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## The Story of Mother Machree

A COMPLETE SHORT NOVEL—THE STORY OF A MOTHER'S LOVE  
AND SELF-DENIAL

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Author of the Song "Mother Machree"

THERE was no candle in the window of the little house with the broken thatch. She who had kept it there, always burning for her children, was gone.

There was no flicker of a hearth fire, either, through the panes of the little crooked windows. They looked blind, those pitiful windows, as if the fire had been the soul of them. Now that it had fled, they could no longer reflect the beauty of the world, nor hint, with cheerful winkings, of the snug comfort inside, with the world shut out.

In the gray twilight a few curlews circled above the house, uttering little plaintive cries. They flew low, seeming to be bound down, not free, held to the earth by the weight of the hurrying clouds, which threatened each moment to dissolve into rain—or tears, Ellen McHugh thought, as she watched the birds—tears for the sorrow and loneliness of the world.

She had come up the long road from her own desolated home—the road that went along the shore, where the mist from the sea hung low and palpable, curling the stray wisps of hair on her bare head. Her little head shawl was pinned about the shoulders of Brian, the small lad who came along with her, holding to the skirt of her dress and whimpering a bit from discomfort and hunger.

She had come to her childhood's home, hoping for the comfort of feeling her dead mother's presence there, as sometimes she had sensed it; but it seemed only coming from desolation to despair. The deserted house was nearer the shore than her own, more bare, for the lack of brush about it, more exposed to the wide terror of the sea. Behind it the empty downs seemed to accentuate its isolation. No blessed spirit would haunt the place that wild night, she feared.

Michael, her husband, had often told her that it was ignorant superstition which made her feel that sometimes her mother came back to comfort her. Perhaps it was. Michael had been a well educated man, far above her in many ways. She hadn't his book learning, but she sensed things sometimes—big things, not to be found in any printed word.

She lifted the latch of the little sagging door and went into the house. It was very chill, colder than outside, and the musty smell of years of smoking peat hung heavy on the air.

The boy held back, pulling at her skirt.

"What for, mither? What for be you going in grandmither's house? It's cold and dark," he said.

"Don't say 'be you going,' darlin'. And you must say 'mother.' Your father tellt you time and again. He doesn't favor the brogue."

"But he's dead, father is. Isn't father dead?"

"All the more reason," said Ellen, "that you should please him, and do as he willed when he was here."

The child couldn't understand this. He stood by the open door, afraid to go out alone or to come in with her. His mother went to the cold hearth, and sat upon a worn cutty stool there, her head in her hands.

The whimper that he had tried to stifle all the way on the long road broke into an open cry. He was only a little lad, around five years or so. He was tired and cold and hungry, and bewildered, too, by the sad proceedings of the day. His father had been placed in a long box and laid away in the little churchyard—his father, to whom people took off their caps as they did to the squire—his father, who was very severe, and yet had unbent at times and had ridden the boy upon his foot to Banbury Cross.

Ellen lifted her face, down which the tears were streaming, and put out her arms to the lad.

"Come over, darlin'," she said. "Come to mother's knee, while I warm you awhile."

The lad came to her, crying loudly, his mouth stretched in an agony of misery from the discomfort of the cold and his empty stomach and the many things which he could not understand. His mother cuddled him in her arms, bidding him be quiet

for a spell, and she would take him home again.

The sobs ceased abruptly. He was a good child, and patient with the pathetic patience of the children of the very poor.

Presently she began to talk to him—crooning, just above a breath, more as if she were talking to herself.

"Your father was a gentleman, Brian—never forget that. He was a schoolmaster—mind you that! Maybe it was but in the hedges he taught, with no pay but a few petaties and a bag o' meal, and maybe sometimes a flitch o' bacon. He was a schoolmaster, for all of that, with as much learning to the inside of his head as those that teach in the big schools in Dublin, with a roof over their heads and real pay to it. The McHughs are not to be sneezed at, Brian lad. They're gentlefolks away back, and had land of their own; and he was always plannin' to make a scholar of you and a gentleman, and that's what's before us to do, lad. I promised your father on his deathbed, some way or another, I'd make a scholar and a gentleman of you!"

"And I'll have oatcake and bacon every day!" said Brian, vastly comforted by the prospect.

"Oatcake and bacon every day," his mother repeated absently. "Be quiet a bit now, and see if I can hear some word will tell me which way to turn."

They were very quiet for a long time—so quiet that Brian fell asleep on his mother's breast.

The night gathered and grew more chill. Through the open door the mist blew in from the sea. There was no sound, to mortal ears, save the rustling of the wind in the thatch and the thunder of the surf on the shore; but Ellen was comforted and counseled.

Who shall say what voice reached her inner hearing? Who shall say what guidance fixed her half formed purpose of somehow making her way to America, the land of promise—the land where Brian could have his chance with the best to be a scholar and a gentleman? At any rate, the silent hours in her mother's house resulted in this determination. She would go to America! She would give Brian his chance!

It was an hour or more before she rose, with the sleeping child in her arms, and stood for a moment in silent farewell, her eyes trying to find the dearly familiar out-



lines of the room, her ears strained for the sound of a voice which would have bidden her Godspeed wherever she went. All around was dark and silence. The wild, black night outside seemed light by comparison, as she went into it, clasping the child tightly and bending her body to the wind.

In those days—some time in the forties, it was—going to America was not the light and easy adventure it is now. It was an undertaking to be looked at this way and that, and well talked over and considered.

Ellen knew that her neighbors would try to dissuade her from her purpose, if she spoke of it. A lone woman with a child, and only a few pennies in her purse! And the thousands of miles to go, with the great sea to be crossed! They'd have both the priest and the minister at her, day and night—she knew that. Maybe they would persuade her to take her comfort as she could find it, among her own people, and to abandon Brian to a life of poverty and ignorance.

It was a hard thing to do, but she decided to slip away in the morning, while the determination was hot within her, without a word to any one.

After a sleepless night, she rose with the dawn and made her simple preparations for departure. There was little to do. Her few poor sticks of furniture must be left behind, of course, and they would make up to the landlord for the rent which was overdue.

When they had finished their meager breakfast, there was still half an oatcake left, besides some meal and a few potatoes. These she put in a rush basket, which she gave to Brian to carry. Then she made a bundle of their scanty possessions, and, slinging it over her shoulder, set out upon the great adventure.

## II

ELLEN had determined to go first to Dublin. It was a long way from Ballymoney, clear through County Wicklow, but she had a brother there, apprenticed to a cooper. She thought that perhaps he could help her to get to America.

It was a bright, clear morning—one of those rare days which have made Ireland the jewel isle of song and story, not the cold, misty land, dank and cheerless, which it is for two hundred and more days of the year. These perfect days are the ones

which Ireland's sons, who have left her, remember. They forget the others, and the dark and cold and sadness of them.

Ellen and Brian stepped briskly along the shore road. Brian capered with delight. They were going somewhere, away from the sadness and tears, out into the great world where anything might happen. Mother had said they were going to America. He guessed they'd be there before night, and be happy ever after!

By noon they had gone as far as the outskirts of Arklow. From a hill they could see the chimneys of that snug little town.

"Is it America, Mother Machree?" asked Brian.

Mother Machree! How sweet that name sounded from the boy's lips! "Mother, my darling," it meant. 'Twas so her husband had called her, often, after Brian had come to them.

She sighed, and put her hand upon the lad's head caressingly.

"No! No! 'Tis a long ways from America yet. We'll have to cross the broad seas to get there; but we're on our way, Brian, and you're not to grow weary nor give up, however hard the road."

"I won't," said Brian stoutly; "but I'm hungry now."

"We'll go down there where you see the little stream," said Ellen, "and have a bite from the basket, and a sup of the cold water. We'll be needing it after the long walk."

Brian ran before her, down the hill, to where there was a thick growth of ash trees about a dancing stream. Behind the trees he found a cart standing—a curiously painted cart with a hood over the back half of it. A piebald horse, released from the shafts, was grazing near it.

Farther along he saw three people seated about a fire, upon which a pot was boiling. They were such unusual-looking people that Brian halted and drew back, afraid, and waited for his mother to come. He peered through the brush at the strange group around the fire.

There was a boy—or was it a man no taller than a boy? Short and thick he was, with legs that bowed out, as he busied himself about the fire. He wore a strange doublet of patchwork in bright colors, and green stockings wrinkled upon his misshapen legs.

Stretched flat upon the ground there was

a long man—as long as a rake, thought Brian, and almost as thin. He, too, was attired unconventionally, in a clinging garment of red, like an undershirt and drawers sewn together. His boots were off, and he was kicking his big bare feet in the air.

The third man was not so unusual in appearance, and was clad in more conventional garb; but he had a quantity of fierce-looking black hair, which hung down to his shoulders and dangled before his eyes.

Presently Brian's mother came from behind the ash trees, and she, too, started aback and stared at the three strange men. The little man—or was it a boy?—turned and saw her.

"Good day," he called, in a piping voice.

Brian ran to his mother, and clung tightly to her hand. The long, thin man sat up. The black-haired one turned about and looked at them.

"Well! Well!" he cried, and his voice boomed so loudly that Ellen and the boy were affrighted by it. "Welcome to our sylvan retreat!"

"I only wanted—" said Ellen, stammering. "We're making the road to Dublin, and we thought to have a bite to eat by the stream. We wouldn't wish to intrude upon you."

She spoke primly. It somehow reminded Brian of the way his father had used to speak.

"Intrude, is it?" said the black-haired man. "Sure and it's God's free world! Come over and have a loan of our fire, and brew your tea along with us!"

"I haven't any tea," said Ellen, approaching bashfully. "I only wanted the water."

"No tea? No tea?" boomed the man. "Then you must share ours. 'Tis good and black and bitter from long brewin'."

Ellen protested, but there was no refusing the good-natured kindness of the man. Presently she and Brian were seated about the fire, very much surprised and a little perturbed by the strange company in which they found themselves.

"'Tis a traveling show we are," explained the man, noting that the girl could scarcely look at them for embarrassment, and that the child's eyes were wide with wonder! "This here is Pips the Dwarf. Yon's the Kilkenny Giant, and myself, I'm the Golden Harpist o' Wexford."

The dwarf acknowledged the introduction by making a face at them and turning

a handspring. The Kilkenny Giant nodded silently, and began to pull on his boots, which had thick soles and prodigious heels. As if he could make himself decent for company in that way, thought Ellen, dressed in his underclothes as he was! She had never seen tights before.

"And so you and your little brother are off to Dublin?" asked the harpist.

"It's not my brother—'tis my own child he is. Brian McHugh is his name."

The harpist looked as if he could scarce believe this.

"You seem overyoung to be havin' a big boy the likes of that. It couldn't be you are a widdy woman?"

"I am that," said Ellen.

The dwarf had given her a pewter cup of black tea. She sipped it. It seemed delicious. It was long since she had tasted tea.

"Have ye come far?" the man asked.

"From Ballymoney," answered Ellen. "I'm hopin' my brother in Dublin will help me to get to America."

"America!" exclaimed the harpist.

"That's no place for a fine young woman like you, with your good looks and the mark of real gentlefolks upon you! They'll be making a hired girl of you over there, and puttin' all manner of slights on you!"

Ellen raised her head proudly.

"They'll make no hired girl of me!" she said, with spirit. "I'm a great hand at fine sewing and knitting."

The harpist shook his head.

"They'll make a hired girl of you," he persisted. "They do it to all that goes there, and there's no risin' above it once you've started into it, for all their grand talk of democracy and one bein' as good as another!"

"I have a brother that's in America," said the Kilkenny Giant.

He spoke very solemnly, in a deep voice which seemed to come from his boots. Ellen forced herself to look in his direction. It was very uncomfortable to be addressed by a man clad in garments which one usually hid decently from public gaze.

"Once I had a letter from him," the giant went on. "All the way from America I had a letter. He said it was fine there. He said he was eatin' meat every day but Friday, and could then, if he would. He wrote me word of a man by the name of Barnum would give something for a big felly like me, to show off to the folks over there."

He looked askance at the harpist, who flared into sudden anger.

"You're gettin' more than you're worth now!" he snapped. "Share and share alike, and you as thin as a herrin'—no proper giant at all!"

"I'm seven foot two without me boots," said the giant defensively.

The dwarf joined issue with the harpist, and jeered:

"Small good you are at all to the show, with never a trick nor a caper to you! Share and share alike is too much, only to stand up and be gaped at. Not even a jig to the foot of you! I'm worth two of him for bringing in the pennies!"

To prove his assertion, the dwarf picked up a long knife from the ground and seemed to swallow it, bringing it out again at the pit of his stomach.

"Could ye do that, ye might be talkin' of bein' showed off in America!"

The giant seemed much abashed.

"I wasn't sayin' I was going to America," he said, a trifle sulkily; "though there might be them there would appreciate me better than here."

"And that wouldn't be much!" the harpist and dwarf exclaimed, almost in unison.

They wouldn't allow Ellen to take any of the food from her basket, but insisted upon her and Brian sharing the rabbit stew which was simmering upon the fire.

"Though 'tis not much of a stew," said the harpist. "My wife, she who was called the Whistling Hen, could make a rabbit stew would stand next to a stuffed peacock on the table of the lord mayor; but I lost her awhile since, and we do the best we can."

"I'm sorry for you," said Ellen, looking at him gently. "Death, 'tis hard!"

"Oh, it wasn't that way I lost her. She ran away with the other giant. That's the reason I have to put up with *him*."

He motioned with his thumb toward the Kilkenny Giant, who looked abashed and apologetic. Ellen felt sorry for the man.

"He's very tall," she said politely. "I don't know as I ever saw a higher man."

"Tall is all right," the harpist agreed grudgingly; "but thick and tall is the way they like 'em. He's no proper giant at all, but I had me handbills printed, and I had to be takin' the best I could find. Giants are as scarce in Ireland as snakes. I don't know but what St. Patrick had a word to say to them, too. The other giant would

have made two of him, and he could jig, and had a great way with the ladies."

The harpist sighed reminiscently.

"He must have had!" thought Ellen, with the first gleam of humor lighting her mind for many a day.

"If you could cook, now!" The harpist looked up at her questioningly through his shaggy locks. "We're making the road to Dublin ourselves. We'd give you and the lad a lift in the cart, and welcome, just to have a woman's hand at the cooking again."

Ellen looked at him doubtfully. It would never do, she thought. Michael wouldn't like it at all, could he look down and see her traveling the road with show folks; but what a help it would be! The way was so long!

"Of course she can cook. I can tell by the looks of her," said the dwarf.

"I can cook fine," Ellen assented, "when there's anything to cook, but—"

"You'll find no lack that way with us," the harpist interrupted eagerly. "We spend a bit of money between us when we come to the towns; and in the country, what are game laws to come between an honest man and his dinner?"

"That's true," said Ellen gravely, turning over in her mind the matter of staying with them. "Nobody would begrudge you a rabbit or a bird now and then, I'm sure."

"Nor a sucking pig, neither," said Pips, grinning, "should one be running around loose and wild like."

Thereupon the dwarf turned a flip-flap and ran about on all fours, squealing like a young pig before the knife. His antics made them all laugh heartily, except the giant, who seemed not to see much humor in anything.

A good laugh shared goes a long way to putting folks at ease with one another. In a few moments Ellen found herself thanking the harpist for his offer of a lift to Dublin, and assuring him that she would do her best to be useful by the way.

### III

AFTER the meal was done, Ellen insisted upon washing the pots and the few battered pewter dishes in the stream, while the men stamped out the fire and hitched the piebald horse to the cart. Then she and Brian were helped to mount over the wheel, and were seated upon a bare plank which ran across the back under the hood. There was a small harp behind them in a green



baize cover. Pips squatted in the straw on the floor of the cart. The giant sat with the harpist on the driving seat.

It was strange company, Ellen thought, for her boy and herself to be in. She was glad they were far from Ballymoney, so that no one they knew would see them; but it meant getting to Dublin and being fed by the way, so the arrangement began to look like a very lucky chance to her.

It was not so pleasant when they came to Arklow, for the people began to come out of their houses to stare at them, and small boys followed them along the road. It was very disagreeable indeed when the cart halted and the harpist descended and began to harangue the crowd in his booming voice. The giant stood up on the driving seat, widening the stretch of his legs, so that Pips could thrust his head between them and grimace and wink at the crowd.

Ellen's face burned. The people stared at her, too, and at Brian, as if they expected them to contribute in some way to the entertainment.

The harp was taken from its covering and handed down by Pips, who made a great show of letting it fall. At last he did fall with it, over the side of the cart, landing on his feet like a cat.

The harpist played some simple airs—old-fashioned things which delighted the people. Pips swallowed knives, stuck pins in his ears and nostrils, and turned flip-flaps, to the accompaniment of "oh's" and "ah's" and delighted laughter. The giant leaned over the side of the cart and shook hands with little boys and girls, who saw him much bigger than he was at that height. He was very solemn, too, which made him seem much more gigantic and frightening.

It was a simple entertainment, but evidently very satisfying to those unsophisticated country folk. There were quite a number of pennies in the hat which Pips passed about, and those who had no penny gave a blessing, which was received as gratefully by Pips as if it were a bag of gold.

"May it come back to you," he would say, "and doubled!"

Pennies or blessings, it seemed all the same to Pips, although he squabbled fiercely enough over an odd penny when they had come out into the country again and stopped to divide the takings. They came near to an open fight, the three of them,

until the giant suggested that the odd penny should be given to Brian. This being agreeable to the others, Brian got the penny, much to his amazement and delight. He had never had a penny of his own before.

It was a slow journey they made to Dublin, stopping wherever the smallest audience could be gathered together, and dallying for long hours over their food, in the preparation of which Ellen grew wonderfully skillful. She performed prodigious culinary feats with nothing but an old skillet and a copper kettle to her hand. They were three weeks upon the way.

At night Ellen and Brian slept in the straw at the bottom of the cart. The men had slept there before, side by side, letting down the dashboard for the giant's feet to stick out behind; but now they gathered their cloaks about them and slept upon the ground. They discounted sore muscles by contented stomachs, and felt no loss in the bargain.

Soon her strange traveling companions began to seem like old friends to Ellen—especially the Kilkenny Giant, who rarely spoke, but who showed her many little kindnesses. He was Brian's favorite, too. Sometimes he would take the lad between his knees upon the driving seat, and Brian would feel very important, being "made over" by a real giant, like *Hop-o'-My-Thumb* in the old tale his father used to tell him.

On the outskirts of Dublin they came to an inn, a shabby place at which they were evidently habitual visitors. The landlord, a very little man in a nightcap, greeted them effusively. He told them he had been on the lookout for them for days. Their usual accommodations were all ready for them, he said—sweet, clean hay in the stable loft for them to sleep upon.

He looked askance at the Kilkenny Giant, who was evidently a stranger to him, and was quite taken aback when Ellen and Brian stepped down from the cart.

"Is it a new woman ye have?" he asked, looking at the harpist accusingly. "What's come o' the Whistling Hen?"

The harpist took the landlord aside, and explained the situation to him. There was much whispering and nudging and bargaining. The harpist displayed the little bag of pennies which he carried in the bosom of his waistcoat. It was finally arranged between them that Ellen was to have a



room in the inn itself, like the real lady that she was.

"I thank you kindly," said Ellen, when the showman came to the back of the cart, where she was tying up her bundle, and told her that he had arranged accommodations for her; "but we mustn't put upon you for any further kindness. I'm off to seek my brother. You've been a real friend to me and the lad, and we'll never forget you for it—you, nor the others," she added, seeing the giant and Pips standing by with very long faces.

There were expostulations and protests, but Ellen was resolute. They had brought her to Dublin, and she was thankful to them; but as for her staying with the show, as they evidently expected, it was out of the question. She didn't tell them, but her inmost thought was that this vagabond life was a bad start for Brian on his road to being a scholar and a gentleman.

She had her brother's address tied in a bit of ribbon pinned to the bosom of her gown, together with a garnet brooch which had been her mother's, and a silver-gilt locket that her husband had bought her at a fair, when he was courting her. She showed the address to the landlord.

"Peter Wiley's cooperation?" he said. "Sure an' I know it well! It's a piece of a way—maybe as much as a mile up this road, and you come to a slaughterhouse. Ye turn there to the right, and the way is straight into the city itself. If ye keep askin' and go straight, ye can't miss Peter Wiley's."

It was hard to say good-by to her three good friends, especially with Brian making such a to-do about it. He clung to the Kilkenny Giant, kicking and screaming in revolt, the tears running down his cheeks.

"I'll go a bit of the way with you," said the giant. "Since he'll not leave go of me leg, maybe he'll come along with it!"

The boy, at that, left his hold of the giant's leg and ran toward the stables, whither the piebald horse had been led, looking very much surprised at being stabled after so many weeks of freedom. Brian ran to the end of the stall and screamed defiance at them. The old horse shied away from him, frightened by the uproar.

"I never knew he had it in him to behave in such a way," said Ellen, abashed. "He was always a good lad. Brian," she said, peering at him from under the horse's

legs, "have you forgotten your father—how he wanted you to be a scholar and a gentleman?"

"I want to be a giant!" wailed Brian.

It took a long time to persuade him to come out, and there had to be false promises of bringing him back again, and true promises of being allowed to spend his penny in Dublin; but at length they were on their way down the long road to the city.

#### IV

BRIAN carried the rush basket, which the harpist had filled to repletion, and Ellen had her bundle slung over her shoulder—just as they had started from Ballymoney, only now they were much heartened by the good food and companionship they had had along the way. The showmen stood at the door of the inn, and waved to them each time they looked back. When they had gone a good piece down the road, Ellen saw that the Kilkenny Giant had left his companions and was following them.

When they reached the slaughterhouse, and turned to the right, they found themselves upon a road on which the houses were closer and closer together as they went along. Ellen had never seen so many houses in a row, nor so many people. They were not in Dublin proper at all, but it seemed already a great city to her, and very confusing.

Glancing over her shoulder, she saw that the Kilkenny Giant was not far behind them and that some urchins had gathered at his heels. No wonder, she thought, striding the streets like a giraffe in underwear! She was ashamed of her pride as she quickened her pace to keep as far away from him as possible. He was a good, kind friend, but too striking to be seen with, walking the streets of Dublin. She hoped that Brian would not look behind and see him.

The boy, who seemed to have forgotten his grief in the many unaccustomed sights and sounds of the city, trotted along cheerfully enough, his eyes big with wonder.

"Is this America, Mother Machree?" he asked.

"No, Brian Dhu," she answered. "This is not America, but we're on the way to it, my boy!"

Ellen felt timid about asking questions. The farther they went, the closer the houses

were. The road turned presently into a cobbled street, and there were many carts dashing about, and a great stir and noise on all sides, which confused her.

She paused at a street crossing, looking vaguely about, and suddenly found herself the center of a yelling, laughing mob. The Kilkenny Giant had caught up with them, the crowd at his heels.

"The cooperage is just a piece farther," he said. "The cooper lives in the big red house up beyond, and the shop is behind it. Go you with the boy alone," he added, with rare delicacy. "I'll hold these rapscallions at my heels."

He turned and executed a grave and unaccustomed caper for the edification of his followers, while Ellen scuttled across the street, dragging Brian, protesting, with her. The boy wanted to stay with the giant and hear the crowd laugh.

A sound of tapping, like a thousand woodpeckers at work, came from behind the big red house, where the name "Peter Wiley" was on a brass plate at the door.

It wouldn't do to be knocking at the front door, Ellen thought, for the house looked very grand to her, with curtains at the windows, and all—better than the squire's house at Ballymoney, by a long ways.

She opened a little gate by the side of the house, and went down a bare alleyway to the back. She passed into a large garden, beyond which there was a long, low structure, with rows of new barrels and kegs and wooden pails piled symmetrically at the front of it.

The tapping was almost frightening as she drew nearer. Then, as she came to the open door of the shop and looked in, the noise died away gradually down the long room, as one lad after another rested his mallet to gaze on the lovely face looking in at the door.

They were all young lads, with bare bodies, except for their pantaloons. There was Denny, the next to the last in the row, grinning with a dawning look of recognition in his gray eyes.

"Ellen! Ellen!" he shouted.

He jumped like a frog over the barrels and staves in his way, and caught her in his arms. Ellen wept with joy at the feel of the tight clasp. It was good, finding one of her own, and getting a glad welcome from him!

The apprentices, after the manner of

youth the world over, fell to embracing one another in mock ecstasy. They thought Ellen was a sweetheart of Denny's. She looked young enough for it, though she was four years his senior.

"What's this? What's going on here?" a harsh voice behind them demanded.

A stern, hard-faced man confronted Ellen as she withdrew from Denny's arms.

"Tis my sister, come from Ballymoney," shouted Denny, over the roar of the mallets which the apprentices had hastily resumed.

"Let her not come in work hours, then!" bawled Wiley, the cooper. "Let her go along with herself now!"

"I'll take me half holiday this day," pleaded Denny, "and do without for two weeks to come."

Wiley looked at him from under frowning brows, but he was always one to accept a bargain that was to his advantage.

"Along with you, then," he said. "See you be back by five o'clock, or you'll get no tea!"

Wiley strode into the shop with never a look at Ellen or the boy.

Denny hastily donned his shirt and jacket, which were hanging on a nail in the shop, and in a few moments the three of them were through the alley and out in the street, away from the noise.

They paused for a moment outside the gate, for Denny to become acquainted with Brian, and to realize that he was an uncle. He laughed delightedly at the wonder of it, and tossed the boy up in his strong arms. Then he took them to the back room of an alehouse on the corner, where they could talk in peace.

The Kilkenny Giant was nowhere in sight. Ellen was shamefacedly glad of that, and a bit regretful, too. She would have liked to thank him for his watchfulness over them.

There was much to talk of over the veal and ham pie and the mugs of ale which Denny ordered so grandly. Ellen thought he must have plenty, to be spending money like that; but she soon learned that it was all he had. It was the very last of the Christmas money which the cooper was bound by agreement to give the apprentices on that day. The lads got their bed and board, but nothing else through the long year; and Ellen soon realized that there was slight prospect of being helped to America by Denny's slim resources.

While they were talking, the door opened, and the Kilkenny Giant strode in. He had bought himself a secondhand greatcoat, which came a little below his knees. Except for his height, and the expanse of red tights between his boot tops and the end of the shabby coat, he looked more like a reasonable human being than before.

He was greeted with a shout of delight from Brian. In a moment he was introduced to Denny, who invited him to sit at the table with them—which he did, doubling up like a jackknife, and not looking so bad with the greatcoat hiding his thinness and the red tights under the table. Brian climbed upon his knees, and was very happy, though it was like sitting on two sharp fence rails.

The question of America was brought up. Denny was resourceful. He agreed with Ellen that America was the place for her and the lad, and he saw a way to getting her there. His apprenticeship would be ended in a few months, but he could bind himself for a term of years to Wiley with wages. Wiley would perhaps give part of the money in advance, to get a good trained man cheap.

Ellen refused this sacrifice at first, but Denny explained that he would bind himself somewhere—to Wiley or another, what matter?

He carried the whole thing off lightly, telling her that she could send him gold in payment, from America, where they said it could be picked up in the streets. His money, with interest, she could send him, in no time at all!

The Kilkenny Giant agreed with Denny. There were rare chances for a person who could get to America, he said.

And so the matter was arranged, and in three days Ellen and Brian were on a little ship, sailing out of Dublin Bay to Liverpool, on their way to the land of promise. Denny went back cheerfully to a hated servitude, remembering the look of gratitude and hope on his sister's face as she waved to him from the ship's rail.

Ellen stood there for a long time by the ship's railing, with Brian's hand held tightly in hers, and gazed at the diminishing shore until it grew small and far away. Then she turned and looked about her, where there were many rough people squatted upon the deck in groups, opening parcels of food, and handing black bottles about.

She raised her eyes to the deck above her head, and saw there a very tall man in a sailor's blue pants, which he did not need to roll up, as the wide flap of them came only to the calf of his legs. He was mopping the deck with a long-handled brush, and looking down at her the while, with something like a grin on his solemn face.

It was the Kilkenny Giant!

"You?" she cried.

"Sure! I'm on me way to America," he shouted. "I'm going to see that felly by the name of Barnum!"

## V

THERE was no gold to be picked up on the streets of New York—Ellen soon found that out. It was a hard place—harder than Ballymoney, because there she had friends, and when the great folks were at the castle there was always fine sewing to do and to be well paid for.

The little store of money which Denny had forced upon her, over the price of her passage on the ship, wouldn't keep them long, she knew, even in the very poor room on the top floor of the miserable tenement in which they lived. The Kilkenny Giant had found the place for her, and then had disappeared. It was more than three weeks since she had seen him. She felt very much alone and frightened in the big, busy city, where no one noticed her, or spoke a kind word to her, from morning to night.

The Emigrant Association had taken her name, and had promised to find sewing for her to do; but each day, when she went to the office, she was told that there was nothing for her as yet.

Slowly a disquieting conviction forced itself upon her—she must be a hired girl, as the harpist had predicted. There was a great demand for good strong girls from the old country. Michael wouldn't like it, could he look down—she knew that. He had always held himself, and her, too, far above even the servants at the castle, with all their fine airs and smart clothes; but there was no help for it.

She didn't believe, as the harpist had said, that there was no rising above it. It would be only for a short while, she thought, until she could save enough money to wait for more fitting employment. So she put her name down on the books of the Emigrant Association as an applicant for general housework.

There was an unforeseen difficulty about



this, too. No one seemed to want a girl with a child to take in with her. She suspected that some of the housewives she saw didn't believe in the wedding ring upon her finger. They looked at her and the boy askance. Her striking beauty was against her, too. They made it very evident that they thought her a light woman who had been cast aside with her child.

She didn't look strong enough, either—not for the way people worked the hired girls in those days.

Every day they gave her names and addresses. Every day she trailed long miles over the city, starting out with high hopes in the morning, and returning unsuccessful and in despair at night. Nobody wanted her.

She began to be frightened. There seemed to be bad luck upon her, no matter which way she turned.

One morning, in the fourth week of her discouraging life in New York, as she was starting out once more to look for work—taking Brian with her, as usual, for she was fearful to leave him alone—she encountered the Kilkenny Giant upon the doorstep, just raising his hand to knock, as she opened the door.

She would scarcely have known him, except for the height of him. He was clad in a suit of butternut cloth, which must have been cut for him especially, as it fitted him all the way down, the trousers being drawn by a strap under his shoes. Upon his head he wore a high hat with a wide brim, and there was a muffler drawn close about his throat.

"Well, and how are you doin'?" he said calmly, as if he had left them the day before.

Stooping, he lifted Brian, who was clamoring for attention, to his shoulder. Brian clasped him tightly about the throat.

"Easy!" he said, flinching a bit. "There's a sore spot I still have on the neck of me. How are you doin'?" he repeated, looking down at Ellen.

"Not so well; but I see you are coming on grand, with your new suit and all."

"I've had a hard time—a very hard time," said the giant darkly. "Strange things has happened me. Will we go up to your place for a talk?"

"Of course! Come in," said Ellen.

She led the way up the stairs, the giant following, with Brian still seated upon his shoulder.

"I feared we had seen the last of you," she said, as they went into the little bare room at the very top of the house, where there were no windows, and only a gray light came through the dusty skylight above.

"I thought I had seen the last of myself," answered the giant gloomily, as he folded himself like a yardstick upon the edge of the bed.

"From the looks of your new suit and all, I was thinking maybe you'd met up with Barnum himself!"

"Yes—that's it! I met up with Barnum!" He sighed dismally. "I was showed off last night for the first time. For two weeks he had me laid by the heels with three sailormen sticking me with needles 'twould curdle your blood to look at!"

"What? Sticking you with needles?"

Ellen thought the poor man was out of his head.

"He said I hadn't the proper heft for a giant—like the Harpist o' Wexford told me long ago, but I wouldn't have the sense to believe him. It's the tattooed living skelington I am now. Bozo, from Brazil, it is I am!"

He looked ready to fall to weeping. Pulling the muffler slightly away from his throat, he displayed a bright butterfly fluttering daintily across his Adam's apple.

"The soreness is all gone," he continued, "except one spot by me ear; but I'm tellin' you I wouldn't go through it again, not for double the twenty dollars a week I'm gettin'."

"Oh, my!"

Ellen could find no further words to express her astonishment at the prodigious amount of twenty dollars a week and the method of obtaining it.

"There's scarce an inch of me not covered, and it 'll never come off—never so long as I live!" He seemed to take a gloomy satisfaction in his plight. "They've got me picture painted on the front of the museum, larger than life, and thinner, too!" A hint of pride crept into his voice at this. "Could the Harpist o' Wexford see that—me picture painted in the face of all Broadway to look at!"

"But you shouldn't have let them!" said Ellen. "To go through life with butterflies on you that will never come off!"

"Mr. Barnum said I was no proper giant, like I told you, but he was real took with the thinness and longness of me.



When he saw me stripped, he like to have laughed the head off him."

"I want to see the butterfly again," said Brian, pulling at the muffler.

"There's a snake on me chest, too," said the giant aggrievedly, as he took off the muffler and opened his shirt a bit to show it. "Did I know it was a snake while they were doing it, I wouldn't have had it; but now it's there, there's nothing to do about it. Anyways, it's not billed from Ireland I am. 'Tis from Brazil he says I come, and maybe there's snakes there, I shouldn't wonder."

The giant seemed very unhappy about the whole thing, but there was a curious pride about him, too, which made Ellen inclined to laugh in spite of her sympathy with him.

"What I came for is this," he said abruptly. "The half lady fell sick last night with the smallpox."

"The half lady?"

"She's a whole lady that sits in a place with looking-glasses about, and those that's outside can see no farther down than the middle of her, so she looks to be cut in half, as it might be. I thought maybe, if you'd come with me to see Mr. Barnum, he might be givin' you the chance to be the half lady."

Ellen looked at him wide-eyed, not clearly understanding.

"She must have good looks to her," he explained, "and must not be known in the city. He was thinking he'd have to send away for another one, but I tellt him to bide till he laid eyes on you, and he's waitin' for you."

"Oh, I couldn't! With people looking at me!"

"There'd be fifteen dollars every week in it for you."

Fifteen dollars! Enough to keep them grandly and send Brian to school, she thought.

"You have only to sit in the place with the looking-glasses, and smile and look pleasant when the crowd passes. The other one was a light trollop, and used to be passing the wink to the boys, but he wouldn't be asking that of you."

Fifteen dollars every week! It would give Brian his chance! It would be wicked, not fair to the child, to refuse it.

"Very well, then," she said, making up her mind at once. "A half lady, is it? If he'll have me, I'll be it!"

As they started out for their walk up-town to Broadway and Ann Street, there was but one thought in Ellen's mind—Brian could go to school now. She knew the very place for him! On Bank Street, it was—a neat little red brick house with a sign by the door which read:

Miss Van Studdiford's School for Little Ladies and Gentlemen.

That was the place for Brian, if Mr. Barnum consented to accept her as the half lady. It was there, no doubt, that the little ones were taught the ways of gentleness. It would be putting Brian on the way that his father had wished him to go—learning to be a scholar and a gentleman at one and the same time!

## VI

BARNUM'S big museum was very frightening when they came to it. It was a huge structure with hundreds of windows, between which there were gaudily colored pictures of the wonders inside. Flags flew all along the top of it.

The giant pointed out his own representation with a strange mixture of pride and resentment. There he was between the Dog-Faced Boy and the Mermaid, but he was no longer the Kilkenny Giant—he was Bozo, the only living tattooed skeleton from Brazil!

Ellen could scarcely rest her eyes upon the picture. The tights had been bad enough, but now there was nothing on him at all save a small bit of cloth about his loins, and the highly colored tattooing sprawling all over him.

"It's too bad!" she said. "Suppose, now, he should want to cut off my legs for life! I wouldn't do it for twice the fifteen dollars. You should have stood out against him."

"A man must live," answered the giant gloomily. "Besides, he has a quick way about him, Mr. Barnum. Before you know it, there you are with the papers signed and all!"

They went around the corner to a little door at the back. There was a man there in a box. The giant strode past him grandly, with an air of authority, saying that he was taking his friends to see Mr. Barnum.

They went up two long flights of stairs and along a dark circular passageway, Ellen clutching Brian tightly by the hand. She tried to keep up with the long stride

of the Kilkenny Giant, whose air of confidence seemed to desert him a bit as he knocked rather timidly upon a door, on which the name "P. T. Barnum" was emblazoned in letters at least a foot tall.

"Come in!" boomed a big voice.

There were two men in the office—one amazingly tall and broad, and the other amazingly short. The big man was seated at a large flat desk; the small one sat upon it, his legs crossed under him. They were Mr. Barnum and Major Tom Thumb, having a business conference.

"Oh!" shouted Brian delightedly. "Like Pips! Look! Like Pips!" He ran over to the desk. "Turn a flip-flap," he demanded.

The little man was very dignified. He climbed down from the desk by the aid of a chair, and stood looking up gravely at Brian—for the child was taller than he—with an odd look of offended dignity upon his chubby face.

"I don't turn flip-flaps, boy," he said in a high, childish voice; "but you may shake hands with me if you like."

Brian was abashed. He took the proffered hand timidly. The little man seemed very old to him.

Mr. Barnum laughed heartily.

"This is Major Tom Thumb," he said. "He's giving you for nothing what you'd have to pay fifty cents for out front." He turned and looked an inquiry at the Kilkenny Giant. "Well, Bozo?"

"It's the girl for the half lady," said Bozo, as we must now call him.

He thrust Ellen forward. She had been lingering, abashed, by the door.

"Ah! H-m!" Barnum looked keenly at Ellen. His bright brown eyes were piercing but kindly. "So you want to be the half lady, do you?"

"I'm needing the money, sir."

Ellen lifted her gray eyes to his face, her own cheeks suffused with a rosy blush. She looked very lovely.

"H-m! A real Irish rose!" exclaimed Barnum, beginning at once to make up a handbill in his mind. "Take off your shawl, my girl."

Ellen removed the small shawl from her head. Her hair was as black as a raven's wing, and had a hint of a wave in it. Little tendrils of curls were on her forehead and at the nape of her neck.

"You haven't stretched it!" cried Barnum to Bozo. "Beautiful, with the proper

clothes! A real Irish rose! Eyelashes half an inch long! From the aristocracy of old Ireland! Kings! Brian Og!" he exclaimed incoherently, keeping his eyes upon Ellen, while he reached for the writing pad he had always at hand. "Bozo, my boy, it's a deal! When can you come?" he asked Ellen.

"Any time, sir. There's nothing to prevent me."

"I must have a few days for publicity. Suppose we say Friday afternoon—that all right?"

"Yes, sir, and thank you kindly. Will I have the fifteen dollars by the week, or how?"

"Every week, as sure as Friday comes around. That 'll do, Bozo. You've done me a favor I shan't forget."

Barnum nodded to them in dismissal, and fell upon the pad and pencil to frame up his advertisement of the Irish rose. They went out of the office without further words, Brian dragged by the hand and staring wide-eyed at Major Tom Thumb, who stared solemnly back at him.

There was a band playing out front as Bozo bade them good-by at the stage door. Soon he would have to be stripped and on view with the rest of the freaks. Ellen assured him that she knew her way back, every step of it; but before she went home there was something to do. She would go to the school for little ladies and gentlemen, and arrange about Brian.

It was quite a long walk from the museum to Bank Street, and Ellen's courage and confidence began to desert her as she hurried along. She was very shabby, she knew that, and Brian's homespun smock, though neat and clean, was far from being in the style of dress worn by the more fortunate children of this new world.

They looked like immigrants, she thought. They *were* immigrants, for the matter of that!

She tried to brace her falling courage by the thought of the good blood that flowed in their veins, but it was a very frightened little woman who paused in front of the little red house, with a flutter in her throat and a sinking feeling about her heart. The sign at the door, which had been so reassuring to her before, now seemed a warning put there to bid her keep out. "Little ladies and gentlemen!" Would the schoolmistress be able to recognize Brian as a little gentleman, in spite of appearances?

Ellen bent to the child, fluffed out the curls from under his cap, and smoothed his dress with her hands. With the corner of her shawl she furtively wiped the tips of his dusty boots. Then, summoning all her courage, she gave a very gentle pull to the brass knob by the side of the door.

The door was opened presently by a neat maid in a cap and apron—a tight-looking little maid, with a pursed up mouth and a thin nose with a supercilious tilt to it.

"Could I see Miss Van Studdiford?" asked Ellen, her voice trembling.

"What do you want?"

The little maid's nose seemed to assume a higher tilt, in disdain of them; but Ellen looked the girl in the eye, and spoke with authority.

"I wish to speak with her."

"Well, I don't know. I'll see. You may come in."

The maid preceded them along the hall, and showed them into a prim parlor, where she bade them wait. Then she went upstairs, looking very doubtful and a bit puzzled at her own weakness in having admitted two such shabby visitors.

There was gilt-flowered paper upon the walls of the room, and several family portraits of painfully aristocratic aspect. An enormous walnut what-not filled one corner, and on its shelves was a collection of bric-a-brac, placed in exact rows. On the marble-topped center table there was a stuffed bird under a glass case, with some gilt-embossed albums laid precisely around it. Two tall pier glasses in gilt frames at each end of the room accentuated its size. It looked very grand and imposing to Ellen. She grew more and more apprehensive of the success of her errand as she waited.

Miss Van Studdiford was the last of a very old family, which had long prided itself upon its gentility, in spite of straitened means. By the time it came to her, the gentility and the straitened means had increased to such an extent that something genteel had to be done about it. Teaching children to be little ladies and gentlemen in the best Van Studdiford manner had seemed the obvious thing to do.

When the thin, angular schoolmistress at length came into the parlor, Ellen was almost overpowered by her appearance and manner. She advanced slowly, with her carefully practiced mincing step, which swayed her crinoline to just the proper degree. She carried a white handkerchief in

her hands, which were crossed primly upon her middle. A large cameo brooch pinned the white lawn collar at her throat, and there was a little cap of rare old lace upon her head.

Ellen rose involuntarily and curtsied. Miss Van Studdiford inclined her head graciously, and seated herself gingerly upon the edge of a horsehair sofa.

"And what can I do for you?" she asked, her lips forming the words primly.

"It's the boy," said Ellen. "I'm wishing to have him educated."

She drew Brian from behind her chair. He was not a bashful child, as a rule, but something about the room and the appearance of the strange lady had quite taken him aback.

"He's a very beautiful little boy," said Miss Van Studdiford, with unaccustomed impulsiveness, and then she pulled herself up. "But, of course, handsome is as handsome does, you know."

She smiled, and, strangely, Brian felt drawn to her. He went over to the sofa and put out his hand to be shaken.

Miss Van Studdiford took the hand graciously, patted it a bit, and drew Brian to her side. He was a very appealing little lad. Most women wanted to cuddle him. There was a wide-eyed wistfulness in his look which seemed to call for care and affection. The schoolmistress was surprised by the strange emotion of motherliness he aroused in her tight little breast.

"Do I know you?" she asked, looking at Ellen.

"Know me? Not till now," replied Ellen, bewildered by the question.

"Your family, I mean."

"I haven't any family, now—only a brother in Dublin. I lost my husband a while back. 'Twas he that wanted Brian to be a scholar and a gentleman, and that is why I am bringing him to you."

Miss Van Studdiford coughed delicately and affectedly, and put her handkerchief to her lips.

"I fear you do not understand," she said. "I wish to cast no reflections, but I require social standing in my pupils. You see, I am responsible for the associations of my little charges."

"You mean you won't take Brian?"

Ellen's heart sank, and tears of disappointment rose to her eyes. Again Miss Van Studdiford uttered her embarrassed little cough.



"If you could bring me letters," she said, wondering at herself for making the suggestion.

"I haven't any letters," said Ellen, and then, desperately: "But I could bring you as much as twelve dollars, and maybe more, each week."

Miss Van Studdiford looked her surprise. Twelve dollars! That was an important sum to her! But she had her fixed standards, which could not be easily lowered.

"My charge is only eight dollars per week for boarding pupils, and four for day scholars, but they must be recommended by some one I know."

The collapse of her hopes was overwhelming to Ellen. The tears from her brimming eyes overflowed as she looked blankly at the schoolmistress.

Miss Van Studdiford was very uncomfortable. She found it distressing to have any one display such frank emotion in her prim parlor, where all emotion was firmly suppressed. The child was leaning against her, his hand at her cameo brooch, twisting it about to get a better look at it. Those small fingers at her throat gave her an odd feeling. They seemed to be clutching at her heart.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I don't mean to be unkind. You see, my rules—I have only the best families. I am pledged to my clients."

Ellen valiantly rose to the defense of her family.

"His father was a schoolmaster in Ballymoney, and as fine a gentleman as you could find. I haven't the education myself, but my own family could hold up its head with the best of them. However, it is not for me to force the child where he is not wanted."

Not wanted! It was difficult for Miss Van Studdiford to keep from drawing Brian within her arms and holding him there. He was leaning against her confidently. Most of her pupils kept at a respectful distance from her. None of them loved her. She had never wanted any of them to love her. She was astounded and embarrassed by the desire she felt to keep this little one with her.

Ellen rose, went over to the sofa, and took Brian by the hand, to lead him away. He was reluctant to go. He pressed, warm and confiding, against Miss Van Studdiford's arm, seemingly fascinated by the cameo brooch at her withered throat.

"Look, Mother Machree!" he said. "It has a face on it, but no pretty red stones like yours."

"Come, Brian, come," said Ellen. "Bid the lady good day."

"Good day, lady," said Brian obediently, and he put up his face to be kissed.

The touch of those soft lips upon her cheek was a more moving appeal than Miss Van Studdiford could withstand.

"One moment," she said, as Ellen went toward the door. "It's most irregular, but perhaps, if you'd leave the child here, entirely in my care, I might reconsider."

"Give him up to you? Not to have the boy with me at night?"

"It would be the only arrangement that I could consider."

Suddenly it came to Ellen that this was the thing to be done. Of course! She would have to be away at night, being shown off as the half lady. She couldn't have Brian with her at the museum.

"Do you mean you would take him, then, did I give him up to live with you?"

"I think—yes," replied Miss Van Studdiford, who felt as if she were speaking in a strange hypnotic dream.

"And I could have him back when I wish?"

"Naturally."

"And you'd feed him and board him for the twelve dollars, and I could come and see him now and again?"

"You may come any time after sessions; but my charge is only eight dollars. I make no distinctions."

Brian looked, bewildered, from one face to the other. He didn't understand the situation entirely. Something momentous was being decided about him—he felt that; but his mother's face looked brighter than it had for days, and there was kindness in the other prim face, too, so he felt that everything was all right, somehow.

"I'll bring him to-morrow, and thank you kindly," said Ellen. "I suppose you'll want the money in advance?"

"It is usual, of course," replied Miss Van Studdiford.

Ellen was so full of gratitude and relief at the turn of events that she was scarcely conscious how she got out of the house, and was doubtful whether she had said a proper good-by to the schoolmistress.

As they went up the street, Miss Van Studdiford peeped after them through the lace curtains. She was astounded by her



own impulsiveness. What had come over her, she wondered? What would people think if they knew? That woman in the patched skirt, with the shawl over her head, and the little boy with his golden head and wistful eyes! What had they done to her? What was it about them that had made her ignore the fixed rules of her ordered existence?

She shook her head in doubt and dismay. She felt that she had been foolishly impulsive.

## VII

ON the following Friday, when the wardrobe woman at Barnum's Museum was fitting Ellen into a spangled waist cut low at the neck, showing more of her shoulders than she liked, she had to think very hard of Brian, safe under Miss Van Studdiford's care, to force herself to go through with it.

"A scholar and a gentleman he'll be!" she said to herself, shutting her eyes tight to think it better. "A scholar and a gentleman, like his father wished! And me a half lady to be shown off for it! Well, it's done now and can't be helped, with my picture out at the front and all!"

She had seen her picture by the door of the museum that day, looking at it through the thick veil which Mr. Barnum had told her to wear day and night. It had looked strange to her, that picture, with great staring eyes and preposterous lashes which stuck up like bristles on a pig's back. She was represented as sitting upon a little swing, with no body to her at all below the waist! The Irish Rose, she was called, and under the picture she had read an account of her illustrious ancestry!

"A descendant of kings," it said. Well, it might be no lie at that. Her mother had often hinted at the like; but then, so had almost every other mother in Ballymoney. It was a common thing there to be descended from kings.

The wardrobe woman wanted to put paint upon her lips and cheeks, but this Ellen firmly refused. She had made no agreement to be painted like a harlot. Besides, she was wary of anything being put upon her, after what had happened to the Kilkenny Giant.

The first day was very hard. There was small need of color upon her cheeks when the crowd began to come and stare at her. Some of them rubbed their noses against the glass case and stood there for five min-

utes at a time, staring intently to see if she winked, or was only a wax figure.

A hoarse voice cautioned her from behind the curtain from time to time:

"Smile! Smile! Nod your head!"

This she did painfully, almost ready to burst into tears, but held back from that by the thought of Brian so safe at the school for little ladies and gentlemen.

The next day was not so bad, and as the weeks wore on she became reconciled to her position, but never easy in it. The bare shoulders and the spangled waist, under the eyes of the staring crowd, were hard to put up with.

The nights were bad, too, in the little room near the museum where she lodged. It was hard not having the boy to cuddle and talk with; but there was the blessed hour between five and six when she would hasten to the school and have Brian all to herself in the garden behind the red house.

Her heart swelled with pride when she thought of him in the new suit of kilts she had bought for him, and of the fine bow he had been taught, which he was always ready to show off to her. He was a great favorite at the school, and Miss Van Studdiford was making a pet of him. He liked her fine, he told his mother. Sometimes she gave him a jam tart up in her room, from her own table.

Brian, in fact, had quite taken the little old maid's heart by storm. She found herself wishing that he were her own. Sometimes she felt quite jealous, looking down from the back window and seeing him in the garden with his mother.

Ellen was a bit jealous, too—the child was so contented at the school; but that was only natural, having so much kindness and ease about him, and little ladies and gentlemen to play with. She rebuked herself severely when sometimes the thought came to her that she wished he missed her more than he did; but he loved her still. There was no mistaking the joy with which he greeted her.

Ellen was undergoing a disagreeable experience at this time, aside from her unrelished prominence as the half lady. She was beautiful, and there were some men who knew, only too well, that she was no half woman.

Young bloods came to the museum and stood in front of her case for a long time, trying to catch and hold her gaze through the glass. One or the other of them would

be at the stage door, at times, and would follow her to her lodgings. She wondered how they knew it was she under the concealing veil. She didn't know that they had paid the doorkeeper for this information. She had been accosted several times, and one of the men had laid his hand upon her arm and tried to detain her upon the street.

There was a man in the museum company, too—a rich man, who had put money into Barnum's venture. He pestered her with attentions whenever he had the chance. She felt inclined to complain to Mr. Barnum. He wouldn't have it if he knew, but she was reluctant to bother him about the matter.

She told something of all this to Bozo, who thereafter accompanied her to her lodgings each night. He was a comfortable friend, Bozo. He never annoyed her in any way—never thought of her much, she surmised, being so bound up in his own depression and his own pride.

Marked for life, and yet a success! He didn't know how to look at the matter, but he considered his situation inwardly most of the time. He was homesick for Ireland, but would never go back, to have every one give him the laugh for the snakes and things upon him!

Barnum was continually changing his attractions, and Ellen trembled when she thought of the day when public interest in the half lady should cease. She had been there for three months. Her glass case was still well surrounded, but there were other and newer attractions, and she noticed that there was not so much jostling and shoving to see her, as there had been at first. She hoped that no one else had noticed that.

One afternoon the museum was more than usually crowded. There was a new attraction—the Siamese Twins. It seemed to Ellen that the whole city had turned out to see them. The crowd churned and writhed in the Hall of the Freaks.

Major Tom Thumb and his bride, and Commodore Nutt and Minnie Warren, like four little dolls that had been cast aside, were looking peevish and neglected upon their platform. They hadn't sold a single photograph. They kept their exaggerated dignity, however. There was a crowd of school children in Mineral Hall. One could hear their high voices. When they came into the Hall of Freaks, the dwarfs would have their innings.

The Fat Lady and Bozo, shown upon the same platform for reasons of contrast, were frankly bored. Only a few stragglers, who could not get near the Siamese Twins, had paused for a glance at them.

In front of Ellen's case there was a family group, evidently from the country. They looked at her with round eyes, wondering audibly how she existed with so many necessary organs lacking, as there must be.

"The pity of it!" the mother of the family exclaimed. "And such a beautiful girl, at that!"

Ellen was inured to comments like these. Her thoughts, as usual, were with Brian. Just an hour more of this, and she would be free to see her son again! She fell into a pleasant reverie, quite detached from her surroundings.

The door from Mineral Hall was directly opposite the case in which she sat, and presently, as in a horrifying dream, she saw Miss Van Studdiford come through it, stepping daintily, like an old hen, with a flock of particularly well behaved chicks behind her.

The schoolmistress looked as if she were doing something of which her gentility did not quite approve. All the best schools had declared a half holiday for the purpose of visiting Barnum's Museum, where there were many instructive things for their pupils to see and hear. Miss Van Studdiford wished to give her charges every opportunity enjoyed by those of other schools, but she could not bring herself to approve of the museum. It seemed vulgar and theatrical to her.

Ellen had had no warning of the intended visit. She had told Miss Van Studdiford nothing of the nature of her occupation. She had felt, in fact, that the little lady would strongly disapprove of it. It came to her, in a flash of dismay, that there was a very disagreeable experience before her—and before the schoolmistress, too, for the matter of that.

She had no time to think. Miss Van Studdiford came straight across the room, directly toward Ellen's case, and in a moment she and the children were standing in a tight little group before it.

Ellen's frightened eyes met Miss Van Studdiford's horrified gaze. Their faces grew white at the recognition. Then there was Brian in his little new kilts, pushing to the front. In a moment he lifted his

eyes to his mother and saw her sitting there, seemingly cut in half, upon the little swing.

"Mother!" he cried. "Oh! Oh! Oh! Mother Machree!"

The child was so frightened that he looked as if he were going into a convulsion. His cry was a pitiful shriek.

Ellen stood up in the face of all the people, and ran through the curtain at the back and out to him. A strange figure she was in the old patched skirt with the span-gled waist above it!

### VIII

THERE was an amazed silence for a second, and then a shout of laughter went up. The crowd surged from the platform of the Siamese Twins, and people hurried in from the other rooms to see what it was all about. Ellen found herself the center of a shrieking, howling mob. Men and women hung on to each other, scarcely able to stand for laughing, and described the ridiculous incident to newcomers, amid shrieks and howls. Even the freaks were doubled with mirth upon their platforms.

An attendant dragged Ellen and Brian through the laughing mob, to a passageway behind the show cases, and up the stairs to Barnum's office. Ellen scarcely realized what she had done, being bewildered by the shouts and laughter and absorbed in her efforts to soothe Brian, whose grief and fear would not abate.

Mr. Barnum was very severe, at first, when he was told what had happened.

"Artists," he said, "should never let their private feelings interfere with their public duties. It's too bad, my girl. You've lost a good job by not being able to control yourself."

Ellen could find nothing to say in her defense.

Suddenly, as the humor of the situation came to him, Mr. Barnum began to laugh. He took up his writing pad, at once determining to get ahead of the public on the joke. He would tell them the whole thing was planned for their amusement. Fortunately it was the 1st of April. Fine! Leave it to him to turn the happening to his advantage!

He was a kind man. He gave Ellen two weeks' wages over what was due her, but he told her that it was all up with the job, for he would never dare to show a half lady again.

"That isn't the worst of it," thought Ellen, as she went away from the museum with Brian. "What am I to say to Miss Van Studdiford?"

She went at once to the school.

Miss Van Studdiford was lying upon her bed, vinegar and brown paper upon her forehead, her face drawn with anguish. Her little world was toppling to its fall, she thought. Her patrons would take their children away when they heard that she had placed the child of a public mountebank among them.

She wouldn't see Ellen. She couldn't bear the thought of her, or of the boy, either, for the moment. She sent down word that Ellen was to take Brian away with her.

As Ellen turned sadly away with the boy, she felt that Miss Van Studdiford was right to be angry with her. She shouldn't have concealed what her occupation was. She had been wrong, and had spoiled Brian's chances forever!

After a few days, in which she sought employment vainly, Bozo came to her again, like a protecting Providence. He brought good news. Mr. Barnum had not forgotten the Irish Rose. He had recommended her to a very fine lady, as nurse for her children. He had vouched for Ellen, glibly framing up a story in which there was no hint of her adventure as the half lady.

"It's a rare chance to live in a fine house, with plenty of the best to eat, and twelve dollars a month besides," said Bozo. "Will ye take it?"

"Would I? And why not? It's a gift from Heaven!"

"Well"—Bozo looked a bit uncomfortable—"there's more to it. You'd have to be puttin' the boy somewheres. They'd not take you with the boy—maybe not, if they knew you had one at all."

Put Brian somewhere! Ellen had heard no more than this.

"There's charity schools," said Bozo, looking away from her.

"Charity schools! Michael's son in a charity school! Never!"

"Mr. Barnum was tellin' me they had good care and all," said Bozo, answering the proud flush which rose to her face.

"Never! Never! We'll starve together first, me and the lad!"

She drew Brian to her side and held him closely.



"I thought maybe you'd be lookin' at it that way," said Bozo. "It wouldn't be any harm to see the lady, anyways. Here's her name and the place she lives, written by Mr. Barnum himself, and she's expectin' you."

He handed her a slip from Barnum's famous writing pad, scrawled all over in his big hand.

"What's the good of going at all, if I must give Brian up?"

"I'll not be given up," said Brian. "I'll stay with you, Mother Machree!"

At that moment there came a timid knock at the door. Seeing Ellen too much distressed to answer it, Bozo strode over to the door and opened it. He was greeted by a little shriek of dismay.

Miss Van Studdiford stood in the doorway, looking up at him, frightened by his size. She grasped her crinoline in her hands and started back, as if to run down the stairs again; but Brian had seen her.

"Miss Van! Miss Van!" he shouted.

This was the name he had given her from the first, not being able to manage the full patronymic. He ran out into the hall and greeted her enthusiastically, pulling her into the room. She squeezed herself against the doorway as she came in, looking very much afraid of Bozo, who, with rare tact, went out at once, closing the door after him.

"Have you a jam tart? Did you bring me a jam tart?" asked Brian.

"No, deary. No, but I will. There will be jam tarts!" Miss Van Studdiford murmured incoherently, looking at Ellen, who had risen and was staring at her, expecting she knew not what discomfort from this surprising visit.

The little schoolmistress had come to reproach her, of course, she thought. She had brought shame upon the school. Ellen trembled a bit as she curtsied and wiped a chair with her apron for the little lady to sit upon.

Miss Van Studdiford seemed strangely choked with emotion. Brian's greeting her with such joy meant very much in her loveless existence. He clung to her hand and leaned against her. No child had ever done that before.

"I'm sorry," stammered Ellen. "I'm sorry things happened as they did. I wouldn't have brought shame upon you, with your being so good to my little boy and all."

"But you didn't," said Miss Van Studdiford. "No one knows. It was most fortunate."

She explained that the story of the April fool hoax that Mr. Barnum had spread about the city had made no mention of her school. It was fortunate, too, that her little pupils had been so bewildered by the uproar that they had not clearly realized what had happened. She had hurried them away, and there had been no harm done at all. No one knew!

"Then I am happier than I've been for days," said Ellen. "With my own worries, I was holding yours, too. I feared it might have brought harm to the school. How ever did you find us here?"

Miss Van Studdiford spoke in a hushed voice:

"I went there. I went to the museum myself. A man at the door told me where I might find you. I would never have done such a thing, but I kept thinking—" She passed her mittened hand caressingly over Brian's bright head. "Such a bright mind, such a little gentleman! It seemed a pity. As the twig is bent, so will the tree incline, you know."

"You are going to take him back again?" cried Ellen hopefully.

"It might be arranged."

Miss Van Studdiford pursed up her mouth and tried to look very businesslike.

"I have just had a position offered me," said Ellen, "though not enough, perhaps, to pay you. It's but twelve dollars by the month, but I'll have my board, and I can give you all of it—and more, perhaps, if I can find sewing to do at nights."

"What sort of a position is it?" asked Miss Van Studdiford, looking more or less apprehensive.

"It's to take care of a lady's children."

Miss Van Studdiford flushed. She wasn't quite sure whether this was going up or down in the social scale. From a half lady in a museum to a nurse girl! A servant's child among her aristocratic charges! It had to be thought about! But she wanted Brian more than anything she had ever wanted in her life.

"I won't be a hired girl long," said Ellen. "I'll work out of it—you'll see! Soon I'll be able to pay you more."

"It isn't the remuneration," said Miss Van Studdiford; "but—oh, dear me, it's very difficult!"

"Am I going back to play with Ariana



DePeyster and Bobby Roosevelt?" cried Brian eagerly. "Mother Machree, am I going back to school? I want to go!"

"You want to leave me, Brian?" Ellen asked sadly.

"But you'll come every day to play in the garden! It's pretty there—not like this place!"

How cruel children can be with their truthfulness and self-seeking!

"Would you take him again?" asked Ellen.

Miss Van Studdiford looked uncomfortable. There was something she wanted to propose, but the words would not come easily.

"Is it my being a hired girl would prevent it?"

"If my clients should know, it would be awkward. I thought perhaps—would you let me adopt him?"

She spoke in a small voice, frightened by her own suggestion.

"No! No!" cried Ellen. "Give him up to you? Never! Never!"

"I know. I—of course not!" Miss Van Studdiford rose, trembling a little. "I was only thinking—the child's interests—"

She moved toward the door.

"Wait!" Ellen's voice was muffled. She scarcely knew what she said. "Give me a day to think. Something may happen. I'll see you to-morrow."

"Very well. Of course you wouldn't. I didn't think you would. I'm sorry; but, you see, it would be the only way in which I could consider taking him."

"I'll come to see you to-morrow," said Ellen dully.

"We'll come to see you to-morrow, Miss Van—to-morrow!" shouted Brian joyfully.

He ran to her where she stood by the door, and lifted his lips to be kissed.

As Miss Van Studdiford leaned toward him, she had an impulse to clasp him in her arms and bear him away in spite of everything; but she went out silently, walking with her little mincing step, hiding all emotion carefully, and pulling down her veil, so that no one in the street should recognize her, coming from that poor place.

## IX

ELLEN slept not at all that night. She sat by the bed, watching the candlelight flicker over her son's face as he lay peacefully sleeping. She was trying to see her way, her duty. Piece by piece, she was

trying to tear every shred of self from her bosom.

She couldn't think it was best to give Brian up entirely. What love and care would make up to him for the lack of a mother's guiding hand? But then, what an advantage to him to be there with Miss Van Studdiford, learning to be a scholar and a gentleman, as his father had wished!

She fell asleep in the gray morning on her knees, her cheek upon the worn coverlet, with Brian's hand beneath it.

Early that day a note came from Miss Van Studdiford, brought by a boy, who said he had been told to wait for an answer. He stood by the door, whistling through his teeth and staring speculatively at Brian, who stared back at him.

The note said:

I will take Brian if you will agree not to see him here during your proposed occupation. I am sure you will understand my motive in making this stipulation. We can arrange for you to see him outside of the school. If agreeable to you, Brian may be sent by the messenger, who is the neighborhood "boots," and thoroughly reliable. He has the fare for the stage, should you decide to send Brian with him.

This was a reprieve, for there was no word of adoption. Ellen felt a glow of gratitude to Miss Van Studdiford. How good she was! How fond of the boy!

Having Brian well taken care of would give his mother a chance to look about. Soon she would find an occupation which would be more pleasing to the schoolmistress. It would be no time at all, she thought, when she could make a home of her own, and have Brian back again.

She walked to the Broadway stage with them, Brian's hand clasped in hers, and the boy whistling behind them. Brian skipped along, delighted to be going back to school.

Ellen watched the lumbering stage as it bore him away. She watched until it was out of sight.

"It is only for a time," she kept assuring herself.

Nevertheless, her heart was heavy as she turned back and went in the direction of Washington Square, where the lady lived to whom Mr. Barnum had recommended her.

The house she sought was a very large one, square and high and rich-looking. There was a garden at its side, which, she could see through the grilled gate, ran a long way to the back.

She pulled the shining brass knob at the gate, and heard the faint tinkle of a bell somewhere in the house. A negro came up the brick walk and opened the gate. Ellen timidly told him her errand. She had never quite recovered from her fear of black people, having never seen one before landing in America.

This one seemed very pleasant, however. He grinned at her reassuringly, and led her through the garden to the back door, and through the kitchen, where there were more black people, to the servants' dining room, where he bade her wait while he informed Mrs. Cutting of her coming.

It was quite half an hour before a white woman, in a frilled cap and apron, with snappy black eyes and a strange accent to her speech, came and led Ellen upstairs to Mrs. Cutting's boudoir, where that lady was at breakfast.

Seeing her in a pink *peignoir* with a lacy cap and ribbons, seated in a huge puffed chair, with a shining silver service before her, Ellen was much impressed. Mrs. Cutting looked like a queen, she thought.

"How do you do?" said the lady, pleasantly enough, but a trifle haughtily.

Ellen was too much abashed to speak. She bobbed a little curtsy. Mrs. Cutting did not ask her to sit down.

"This Mr. Barnum told my husband that you are from Ireland, of a good family?" she said.

There was a faint note of interrogation and disappointment in her voice. Ellen looked very shabby.

"Yes, ma'am," she replied meekly.

"I hope you haven't a brogue. I can't let the children acquire a brogue."

"Not when I am careful," said Ellen, speaking very primly.

"Well, be careful all of the time, then. I understand that you are the widow of a professor or something, and that you haven't been employed in domestic service before?"

Ellen inclined her head, still too much abashed to speak.

Mrs. Cutting looked at her for a moment in silence, a trifle petulantly.

"Oh, dear! It's most annoying, this changing! Nurse is going to be married. I'm sure she had a comfortable home here. Well! Well! We'll try you for a fortnight. Simone! Simone!" she called, to the Frenchwoman, who had gone into the bedroom, and who came to the door at her

summons. "Show this woman up to the nursery, and tell nurse to instruct her in her duties. Tell Joe I shall want the landau at eleven o'clock."

Ellen followed the Frenchwoman out of the room, feeling that she had impressed Mrs. Cutting very unfavorably. It was true, she had. Mrs. Cutting was annoyed with the whole thing. Her husband had such queer acquaintances—this Mr. Barnum, for instance! Why insist upon her taking a nurse upon his recommendation, simply because he had told her husband a tale of undeserved misfortune? The woman wasn't going to do at all, but she would have to give her a trial. Mr. Cutting's word was law in that house.

The fortnight had not passed, however, before Mrs. Cutting found that she had made a mistake in her first judgment of Ellen. The woman was a treasure—so quiet, so capable, so refined. The children took to her at once. Before a month had passed they adored her.

Ellen didn't measure her duties. She was willing to help in any household emergency. It seemed that she was always substituting on some maid's day out. Silently and unobtrusively she grew day by day in the estimation of the whole family. Mr. Cutting rather plumed himself upon having found such a treasure. Even Mrs. Cutting sometimes dropped the formal "nurse," and called her by her name.

That lady had occasional spells of bad headaches. Before long it was Ellen for whom she called, to soothe her brow, and to sit beside the bed and fan her until she fell asleep.

Every fortnight Ellen had a day out, and Miss Van Studdiford would bring Brian to a little unfrequented park in Greenwich Village. Here they would have two precious hours together, while the schoolmistress sat on a bench at a little distance and watched them jealously.

"Why don't you come to our house, Mother Machree?" Brian often asked. "There's a swing in the garden. You could swing me."

"But it's fine here, Brian. Isn't any place good when we are together?"

"Yes," Brian would reply, a bit doubtfully; "but I like it better in our garden."

Then, seeing a shadow upon his mother's face, he would put his arms about her neck and kiss her again and again, as if in apology for having hurt her.

Watching from her bench, Miss Van Studdiford would feel a pang when she saw this. Brian was fond of her, but not in that way! Not enough!

A year passed by, and slowly the conviction forced itself upon Ellen that what the harpist had said—so long ago, it seemed—was only too true. Once a servant always a servant!

She saw no way of bettering her position. Every hour of the day was taken up by her numerous duties. At night she sewed for Brian. Everything he wore was fashioned by her skillful fingers. Every penny of her wages went to his keep. Mrs. Cutting supplied her nurse's uniform, and she needed nothing else for herself.

Her secret meetings with Brian, and Miss Van Studdiford's constant apprehension that they would be seen together, began to force a feeling of inferiority upon her. She was a detriment to her own child. He would be ashamed of her when he grew up, she began to think. She would be a millstone about his neck. A servant's child!

Something must be done about it.

One Sunday, as she was taking her little charges to Sunday school, she encountered Miss Van Studdiford upon the same errand, with her boarding pupils in a sedate line behind her. Brian was walking with the schoolmistress, who held him proudly by the hand. When he saw his mother, he uttered a glad cry of greeting, and tried to pull away from Miss Van Studdiford.

The children stared, and the schoolmistress hastened her steps, almost dragging Brian along. Ellen could hear his wailing cry of rebellion as they turned the corner.

The Cutting children had been curious about the incident. They had wanted to know who was the little boy who had called "Mother Machree" after her.

Ellen hated to lie. She would have liked to tell them proudly that the boy was her son; but she remembered her promise to Miss Van Studdiford, and put them off with some vague murmur about the child mistaking her for some one else.

The following day she received a note from the schoolmistress—one of a series which had been hinting that the present state of things could not continue. For Brian's sake, they must make some permanent arrangement. Miss Van Studdiford's former notes had hinted delicately and obliquely at the subject of adoption; but in this one she came out with it flatly.

She didn't mean to be cruel. She had come to regard Brian as her own, and to fear for his future.

Ellen could not bring herself to answer the note at once. If she refused the demand—for it was a demand now, no longer a veiled suggestion—she saw the consequences with painful distinctness. She would be back where she had started—she and Brian in some miserable room, face to face with the heartbreaking struggle for existence; and Brian's chances would be lost forever!

The thought came to her to confide in Mrs. Cutting. She knew that her services were highly valued by her mistress, and perhaps she would be allowed to bring Brian there. He was a good child. She could have him in the room with her. They would scarcely know he was in the house.

But her clear vision saw only too well the selfishness of this idea. She would be happy in having him with her, but how about Brian? A servant's child! Creeping about, silent and repressed, seeing more fortunate children pampered and groomed and taught, growing servile, perhaps, and boot-licking for odd pennies! No! No! It was not to be thought of!

She had no friend to whom she could go for advice or help. Bozo had left Barnum's Museum, and was traveling with a small circus in the West. He had written to her once, and there was a definite farewell between the lines of his letter. Bozo had tact. He recognized her as a gentlewoman with ambition to better herself in life, and he knew that his acquaintance was of no advantage to her.

She eagerly scanned the advertisements in the papers, and applied for several positions which seemed promising and of a more dignified character than her present employment; but there were meager chances in business for a woman in those days. There were none at all for Ellen, with her lack of training. Domestic service was the only thing she was fitted for. It was useless for her to try to rise above it!

So at length Ellen made the great surrender. Brian McHugh became Brian Van Studdiford, hard and fast, by law, and their meetings ceased, so that he might be weaned from the memory of her. Ellen stipulated, however, that no one but she was to pay for his education and upbringing. Miss Van Studdiford accepted this condition gratefully enough. Her school



brought her a bare subsistence, and Ellen's help was necessary, if Brian was to have equal advantages with the other children.

It was not so easy to wean Brian from the memory of his mother. There were times when he cried for her, and would not be comforted; but as the months went on and the years, the memory of her began to grow dim. After a while, without being told in so many words, he was given to understand that his mother had died, that she would never come back to him again.

### X

ONE fine autumn day in the year 1863, a young man strode happily up Broadway, looking very fine indeed in a spick-and-span-new uniform. He was a lieutenant of the Tenth New York Regiment, which had not yet seen active service.

Incongruously, and in despite of regulations, he carried a small round bouquet covered with tissue. He carried it proudly. He was going to see his sweetheart, and didn't care much who knew it.

He was followed by sympathetic glances. It was evident that here was a young soldier in love, and a handsome, well set-up young soldier, who might be sure of his welcome wherever he was going.

He spoke to many people along the way, being well known in the city and received among the best there. He was the adopted son of old Miss Van Studdiford—a distant relation of hers, it was understood. His friends predicted that he would have a great future. Before the start of the war he had already made his mark as a lawyer. He was in Judge Deems's office, and it was said that when the present unpleasantness was over, he would be offered a partnership in that important law firm.

But the happiest circumstance in this young officer's life was that the opposition which the fashionable Cuttings had shown to his courtship of their daughter was gradually wearing away. The only objection they had had to him was his lack of fortune, and even they could see that this would be mended shortly. With Judge Deems to help him, he would go far.

Strangely, as the young man strode happily along, he was not thinking exclusively of his sweetheart. Part of his thoughts were with the little old woman who had stood at the door of their home on Bank Street, and had watched him so fondly and anxiously as he went up the street.

How good she had been to him always, he thought! Dear Aunt Van! What immense sacrifices she had made for him! How delightful it was that he was beginning to repay her!

He would pay her more and more as time went on, he thought proudly. She would have her carriage and pair with the best of them, before he was many years older! By George, he would begin to call her "mother" that very day, as she had always wanted him to do.

Mother! Something teased at the back of his mind. Why had he been so reluctant to give Aunt Van that name? She had been more than a mother to him. He remembered his own mother vaguely, like a beautiful dream. A beautiful, sorrowful dream! It was that dream, of course, which had kept him from calling Aunt Van "mother."

He was sorry that he had been so stubborn about it. He would try the new name upon her that night, he decided. He grinned as he imagined the look which would come to the anxious old face when he spoke the word she had always wanted to hear.

There was a pleasant stir and excitement in the air. The Stars and Stripes were flying from every shop front and house. Bands played. There were the sounds of marching feet and rolling drums as companies in new blue uniforms were being drilled upon the streets and squares.

New York was in the war in earnest. Gone were the days when the "peace at any price" men had kept the city in a state of ferment and dissatisfaction; when powerful interests had used every means at their disposal to force the government into some compromise, *any* compromise, which would lead quickly to an adjustment of the differences between the North and South.

As the young officer skirted Washington Square, he looked with envy toward the barracks established there for the accommodation of troops passing through New York from the North and East on their way to the front. He was impatient at being kept in the city upon police duty. He feared the war would end without his having been in it at all.

The Cutting family still lived in the old house on the north side of the square. They had not joined the hegira of the fashionable folk to the hideous "brownstone fronts" on Fifth Avenue, but were well



content in the spacious red brick house with its large garden behind it, and its broad, lavender-tinted windows looking out upon the park.

The young man ran eagerly up the steps and pulled the bell vigorously. In a moment the door was opened by old Joe, the butler, who greeted him with a delighted grin.

"Yes, sir, cap'n," he said. "Miss Edith ain't only in—she's waitin'."

He chuckled and nodded his head toward the front drawing-room.

The young man didn't wait to be announced. He went across the broad hall to the drawing-room, where Edith was busy rolling fine linen into bandages. She had been peeping through the curtains, watching for him to come up the street. Seeing him, she had hastily run across the room and seated herself before a small table, upon which her work was spread. She was breathing a little quickly, but she tried to call up a look of welcoming surprise.

"Oh, is that you, Brian?" she said. "Is it really four o'clock?"

"It's ten at night from the way I feel," said Brian, coming toward her as she rose, and taking her two hands in his. "I thought the day would never end. I hoped you'd feel the same way, after last night."

Edith dimpled.

"I did, too," she confessed; "but I mustn't make you conceited!"

He kissed her upon the cheek. These little flying kisses were all he had had, as yet. Even last night, when she had confessed that she loved him, his lips had only been able to touch the tip of her ear. Girls had to be wooed in those days. There was no meeting a man halfway, or perhaps three-quarters, as is the fashion now.

Brian presented his bouquet. It was of moss roses and forget-me-nots. They knew the language of flowers, these two, and Edith laid her lips upon the blossoms, blushing at the sentiment they expressed. He kissed her again, this time as near her lips as the little dimple at their corners. She ran away from him, laughing, and pulled the bell cord for a maid to bring a vase and water for the flowers.

Brian followed her, and was about to win another kiss, when they heard footsteps in the hall. Edith laughingly pushed him away, and he retired hastily to the window, where he stood looking out.

In a moment a woman appeared in the

doorway—a little bent woman in a black gown and a plain white apron.

"Oh, Ellen!" cried Edith. "I didn't mean to trouble you."

"All the maids have gone with your mother to the Soldiers' Rest, so I—"

She paused. Brian had turned from the window, and it was as if something in his appearance had struck further words from her lips. She retreated toward the door.

"I only wanted a vase for the flowers," said Edith, showing the bouquet proudly. "Brian, this is Ellen, my old nurse." She put her arm affectionately about the little woman. "Ellen, this is my—this is Lieutenant Van Studdiford."

Ellen looked very white. Her hand trembled as she took the flowers from Edith, but she managed something between a bow and a curtsy toward Brian, who was staring at her with a strange, puzzled look in his eyes. He said nothing, not even a conventional greeting.

There was a moment's odd silence. Then Ellen turned and went from the room.

"Why, Brian," said Edith, "I don't think you were nice at all. That's Ellen. She's been with us all my life, and longer, for she nursed Richard and Emma, too. We think of her as one of the family. I hope you're not a snob!"

"Why, no—what an idea! I was just—I thought I'd seen her some place before."

Edith pouted a bit.

"You might have shaken hands with her or said something!"

"I'm sorry," said Brian. "I will the next time. It's odd. She made me think of something that I couldn't quite get the meaning of."

Meanwhile Ellen, in the pantry, was leaning against one of the shelves, steadying herself, before she reached for a vase in which to put the flowers. She had felt that the meeting with her son must come some time, ever since Edith had confided in her, several months ago, about her love for Brian; but she had hoped somehow to avoid it.

How mad she had been, she thought, to stay on for a moment after Edith told her! There was danger to Brian's happiness in her presence in that house. The startled, half recognizing look in the boy's eyes had frightened her. If he should see her again and again, as he must if he married Edith, might he not piece together scraps of childish memories and see the truth whole?

For his sake she knew she must go away. She must leave the only home she had known for more than twenty years. She didn't mind the sacrifice for herself, but what was she to say to the Cuttings? She was regarded there as a fixture, as the main prop of the household. How could she explain her sudden leaving?

Mrs. Cutting could never get on without her. She was home-keeper, administrator, confidante, backbone to every person in that house. She loved them all, but she couldn't stay there and run the risk of their finding out that Brian Van Studdiford was Brian McHugh, the son of the poor hired girl who had come to them many years ago in her patched gown and ragged shoes—a poor ignorant Irishwoman, at whom they laughed lovingly at times, because of her saving ways and the slight brogue that still clung to her tongue. To have the truth known would be to pull down all the bright edifice she had builded about Brian so painfully and laboriously during the long years.

She put the flowers into a vase, and gave it to old Joe, to take back to the drawing-room. Then she went upstairs to her own little room upon the top floor, to think things out.

How handsome he had looked, her boy, in his new uniform! Handsomer even than when she had seen him last, standing in his cap and gown, to receive his diploma at the university. She had sat far back in the auditorium, a shabby, old-fashioned figure in the gay crowd. She had seen Miss Van Studdiford seated up in front, just behind the students, among their parents and friends. She had not cared about that, because she knew that it was not Miss Van Studdiford who had accomplished the miracle of placing Brian among those children of fortune. Every bit of his way Ellen had paid—paid by saving and scrimping and being thought close by the open-handed Cuttings.

They had often chaffed her about it. Sometimes they called her "Mrs. Midas," and asked her what she was going to do with all the money she was hoarding? She had never had a new gown to her back these many years. She had performed miracles in the remaking of hand-me-downs from various members of the family. In her earlier years she had even made slippers from bits of carpet, to save her one pair of shoes, which she was obliged to wear when

she went out into the park with the Cutting children.

She didn't wonder that they thought her stingy. How surprised they would be if they knew that she had saved nothing for her old age! Her wages had been raised from time to time, and frequently Mr. Cutting had invested small sums for her, much to her advantage. Doubtless they thought she was very well fixed.

There was her brother Denny, too. Long since she had paid his loan, with interest. He thought her rich, and had recently written to ask a loan for one of his boys to go to college. She would have to refuse him. If it were not for the war, she might have managed it; but it would be months now before Brian would be earning again. She felt that it would not be fair to him to spare a penny to any one else.

It would be hard to leave the Cuttings, but she was well and strong. There was some place in which she could make her living. It must be in New York, however. She didn't want to relax her watchfulness over Brian.

There had never been a time in all the years when she had lost touch with him. Many a long afternoon she had lingered across the street from the little red brick house, hoping to get a glimpse of his face at a window, or perhaps to see him come out with the other children for a sedate walk to Washington Square, where they were sometimes allowed to play.

She had fashioned his life after the pattern of that led by the little Cutting children. When they had velocipedes, Brian had one also. When the French *mademoiselle* came to them, Brian was sent to M. Thébaud, in Ninth Street. He had been in the same dancing class with them at Signor Bellini's; and so on, step by step, she had given him equal advantages with the children of the rich.

Miss Van Studdiford had always carefully carried out Ellen's wishes, expressed in veiled notes which came to her from time to time. Poor Miss Van Studdiford! She had not dared to disobey in the slightest particular, fearing that Ellen would appear in person, and make some claim upon Brian's affection and obedience.

She need not have feared that. Once having made the great surrender, Ellen stood firmly by her agreement.

Miss Van Studdiford's school had been

long abandoned. It had gradually died out with the progress of the city, and for more than twelve years she and Brian had lived entirely upon Ellen's earnings. The schoolmistress felt uncomfortable when she thought of this, but she thought of it as little as possible. It was a thing to be ignored, since it served Brian. The young man, on his part, understood that Miss Van Studdiford had a small income, upon which they lived so meagerly.

Ellen pondered long and painfully. If Brian were coming into the family, she must leave it; but she decided to wait until the last moment, and to be very careful to keep out of his way.

## XI

As Brian went back home through the dim twilight, under the happiness at his heart and the heady thrill in his brain something kept stirring—something sad, something disquieting. Edith had been sweeter, more yielding, than ever before, but there was an ache somewhere.

Memories came of his childhood—very vague memories of a time when, it seemed, he had lived amid crowds and with strange people—giants and ogres and a little man who grimaced. There was also a memory of an apple tree in bloom, and soft arms about him, in a garden. It was Aunt Van's garden, of course, but the arms had been his mother's.

It was strange, he mused, how long a time it had been since he had given a thought to his mother; but then Aunt Van had always discouraged his thinking of her. That wasn't right. A man should think of his mother at times, even if she were long dead.

Miss Van Studdiford was waiting at the parlor window. Brian smiled indulgently when he saw that the prim lace curtains were drawn slightly aside. She always seemed to be waiting there, watching for him. He had never given her any cause for anxiety, and yet she was always anxious, always troubled, he thought, by some fear of what might happen when he was away from her.

She met him in the hallway when he opened the door. Her strained old face looked a question.

"It's all right, Aunt Van," he said. "Look at me! I'm an engaged man—at least if Mr. Cutting consents when I see him to-morrow!"

A pang went through Miss Van Studdiford's heart. Engaged! Of course, she had known it must come some day. She tried to be happy about it for his sake, but to share his affection was very hard to her. She knew only one way in which to love, and that was to hold tightly, not to give.

"You shouldn't have spoken to her, Brian, until you'd seen Mr. Cutting."

"Oh, Aunt Van! The world's moving! We don't do things that way any more."

"In my young days," began Miss Van Studdiford, in her primmest schoolmistress manner, "girls never allowed a man to guess at their sentiments until the parents had been consulted."

Brian laughed, and, putting his arm about her, looked down at her boyishly.

"Your young days couldn't have been very thrilling," he said, and then added bashfully: "Mother!"

Miss Van Studdiford started, and looked into his face. Then she leaned against him, trembling, as he led her back into the little parlor. How long she had wanted to hear that name upon his lips, and how guilty she felt now that he had uttered it!

"What made you call me that, Brian?" she asked, as he seated himself upon the sofa by her side.

"Because you've been a mother to me, and I'm so happy to-night! Besides, I've been thinking a bit of my other mother."

Miss Van Studdiford stiffened and drew slightly away from him.

"Of what did she die, Aunt Van?" he asked, slipping unconsciously into the familiar form of address, "and when?"

Miss Van Studdiford flushed—a painful flush on those old, withered cheeks.

"Don't let us speak of it, Brian. Why bring up unhappy memories?"

"But I want to talk of it," persisted Brian. "It doesn't seem fair. We never speak of her. Maybe they know it when they're gone. Maybe it makes them lonely not to be spoken of."

He laughed a little self-consciously, to take off the edge of the mawkishness of what he was saying and feeling.

"I sort of feel that I'd like her to share all my happiness, and—I suppose you think I'm talking like a girl?"

"No! No! It is an added grace to a strong man when he has sentiment."

Miss Van Studdiford never failed the opportunity of pointing out little niceties of conduct and thought.



"Where was my mother? Where did they put her when she died? Why do we never go to the place where she is buried?" Brian persisted.

"I don't know. I mean, it is very far away. I never thought it was good for children to nurse sad memories."

"But it isn't a sad memory to me. She seems a sort of nice dream, my mother. Besides, I'm not a child now, and I'd like to know. I'd like to go with Edith some day to that—that place. I think it's right I should."

Miss Van Studdiford's face became very strained and white. She hated to lie, for she thought it a deadly sin, but she saw no way out of it.

"It's not in this country at all—in Ireland," she murmured, scarce above a breath.

Brian looked puzzled.

"But she was here, Aunt Van! I remember she used to come to the garden. I remember it distinctly. It's odd, but I remember a brooch with red stones in it. She used to let me play with it. It's strange remembering a thing like that, and forgetting so much else! All the way home to-day I was thinking of her. I can almost remember how she looked. Her eyes were big! What relation was she to you, Aunt Van?"

"Very distant," said Miss Van Studdiford in a smothered tone. "A distant cousin."

How deep she was getting into the morass of untruth! How uncomfortable, how distressing it was! Weak tears came to her eyes.

"I want to know more about her, Aunt Van. You never told me anything. Why should you make a mystery of it?"

"I'm not. It is you who are making it a mystery. I can't talk about it. It is all too painful. I won't talk about it, Brian—I will not!"

She fell to sobbing. It was very painful to see an old woman cry.

"Then don't," said Brian, rising and patting her shoulder. "I didn't mean to distress you. We won't say any more about it, now."

Miss Van Studdiford took his hand and clung to it.

"You've never distressed me," she said. "You've always been good, Brian. I'm nervous and upset. It's this dreadful war! I keep fearing that you may be ordered

away. I'm an old woman, and you are all I have!"

"Ordered away! Small chance of that, worse luck! Why, Aunt Van, the war 'll be over in a few months. I shall never see active service. I'm just a parlor soldier. If you had only let me enlist when I wanted to!"

Miss Van Studdiford shook her head. This was the one sore subject between them.

In a few moments he left her and went upstairs to his room, feeling very much dissatisfied and puzzled. Was there some stain upon his birth, he wondered, which made Aunt Van reluctant to discuss his mother with him? No! No! He wouldn't think that—not for a moment! Not of his sweet, beautiful mother, whose image began to grow stronger and more distinct to him.

Early the next afternoon, as soon as Brian was relieved from duty at the armory, he went down town to see Mr. Cutting at the banker's office. He felt very nervous about the coming interview. Mr. Cutting was a rich and influential man, and had a stern manner that made him difficult of approach.

Brian was asked to wait in the outer office, as the banker was engaged. He sat there for ten minutes or so. Then the door of the private office opened, and a woman came out. It was Edith's old nurse.

Again Brian experienced the odd emotion that her appearance the day before had brought to him—a sort of puzzled groping for an elusive memory.

Ellen looked very much disturbed. Her face was flushed.

Brian welcomed the opportunity to make up for his boorishness of the day before.

"How do you do?" he said, standing before her with his cap in his left hand and a very pleasant smile upon his face.

He extended his other hand to her. Ellen forced herself to take it with seeming indifference.

"I'm very well, sir, I thank you," she said, trying to put calmness and respect into her tone.

Her voice sent a thrill through Brian—her touch, too. He couldn't understand it.

"Where have I met you before?" he asked, clinging to her hand, which she was trying to withdraw from his clasp. "Surely I've met you before?"

She shook her head dumbly, not looking at him.

Just then a secretary came to say that Mr. Cutting would see Lieutenant Van Studdiford, so he was obliged to leave Ellen there, with all sorts of unanswered questions between them.

When he went into the office, he found the banker looking very glum.

"Well, Van Studdiford," he said, "I'm in a devil of a stew! See that woman who just went out?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, she's been with us for twenty years—more than twenty years—and now she comes and gives me a month's notice. She hadn't the courage to tell my wife. I don't wonder! Of all ingratitude! Why, we've treated her like one of ourselves. I won't have it!" He thumped his fist upon the desk. "I told her so. She raised every one of my children. Gad, who's going to put the studs in my shirt and tie my tie?"

He looked indignantly at Brian, as if expecting him to answer the question.

"Why is she leaving?" asked Brian.

"Hasn't any reason at all—not a blamed reason. Oh, women are the devil!"

Brian felt apprehensive. It was unfortunate that Mr. Cutting had been put into a temper just when, perhaps, he had come to make him more angry still.

Suddenly Cutting's eyes twinkled.

"Well," he said, "I guess you didn't come to hear my domestic troubles. Edith paved the way for you this morning. What makes you think you can support my daughter in the style to which she is accustomed?"

"I can't; but I can take care of her, and I have a future. Judge Deems is going to take me into partnership."

"Yes, I know. I stopped in to see him this morning. I guess it's all right with me, young man, if her mother consents. She's mighty keen on family, you know."

"Well, my aunt, Miss Van Studdiford—" began Brian.

"Yes, yes—fine old stock, but not much in the public eye at present. Mrs. Cutting is a bit of a snob, you know, though she denies it. She likes to march with the big procession!" He rose and put his hand upon Brian's shoulder. "I guess it will be all right. She likes you, and so do I, and my little girl—well, I don't think there's ever been any one else for her, and I want her to be happy. But there must be no

talk of marriage until the war is over. I don't share the popular optimism about it, either. I think it is going to be a long, hard struggle."

He grasped Brian's hand and shook it. The lieutenant grinned boyishly, and could find no words. It was wonderful to have the matter settled so quickly and easily! He went out of the office scarcely feeling the ground beneath his feet.

In the hallway the young man stopped to mop his brow. Beads of perspiration stood upon it, as if he had been running. He was breathless, too, but oh, so happy, so triumphant!

## XII

A FEW blocks from Mr. Cutting's office, on the corner of Ann Street, was the building of the New York *Tribune*. Brian saw that there was an immense crowd gathered in the streets about it—a still, ominous-looking crowd, pushing sullenly forward to get a glimpse of the placards of news in the lower windows.

There was a certain element in the city which had worked itself up, or had been worked up by agitators, over the rumor that the negroes were to be emancipated. A fear had been engendered that, in this event, neither person nor property nor the honor of their womanhood would be safe. Horrible pictures had been implanted in the minds of the ignorant of a world overrun and devastated by hordes of black freedmen, who would reduce the social system to chaos and rule by right of numbers and brute strength.

Brian supposed that the news which was holding the crowd in such sullen, repressed stillness was a confirmation of the rumor of emancipation; but as he shouldered his way along he began to hear on all sides the word "draft" in muttered and rebellious tones.

So there was to be a draft! Soldiers were needed at the front, while his regiment was attending upon the mayor and policing mass meetings! Parlor soldiers! He began to share the indignation of the crowd. With the sublime egotism of youth he felt that if the gallant Tenth were ordered to the front, things would be settled in short order.

Suddenly the hot, fierce note of a fire bell was on the air. At once, as if it had been a signal, the sullen crowd through which Brian was pushing became a seeth-

ing, yelling mob of rioters. With the suddenness of a feat of legerdemain, a frightened negro was lifted for a moment above the heads and shoulders of the crowd, his face ashen, his mouth stretched in an agonized yell. In another moment, it seemed, a rope had been produced, and the negro was hanging by the neck to a lamp-post, while the crowd swirled by and bumped against his dangling legs as he writhed in his death agony.

Brian was carried along with the mob. So tightly was he hemmed in that he could not reach the pistol at his belt. He thrust with his elbows and knees, shouting for order—futile shouts and ludicrous, in the face of the mad excitement which had seized the mob.

When at length he had fought his way free, he stood for a moment on the steps of the Chemical Bank, trying to regain his breath and to collect his thoughts. He was bruised and bleeding, and there was a wild ringing in his ears. About him were dining bells and the summoning sound of trumpets, and here and there a glow of fire and columns of smoke. Not one fire, but a dozen, had been simultaneously kindled by incendiaries, who had been waiting for the signal of the announcement of the draft.

Running and stumbling, and being caught constantly in pools and eddies of excited rioters, somehow Brian reached the armory. He was immediately ordered, with a squad, to the street-car barns. They were to board a car, ride down into the midst of the turmoil, and attempt to quiet it by a show of authority. He had strict orders not to fire upon the crowd except in case of extremity.

Within half an hour his men were stationed, kneeling upon the seats of a little car, with a rifle protruding from each window. Upon the top there were more men, seated back to back, their firearms ready, with nervous fingers upon the triggers.

Brian stood upon the front platform, beside the terrified driver, his pistol in his hand. He felt strangely calm, and a little inclined to laugh at the humor of his strange entrance into the war—upon a street-car.

The car rattled rapidly down town. Soon they were in the thick of it, progressing slowly through a dense crowd, which fell back a bit and was quiet for the moment, daunted by the appearance of armed authority. Brian ordered the driver to

stop. Leaning forward, he shouted, haranguing the crowd, bidding them remember that they were Americans—that the President expected every man to do his duty.

He got no further in his speech than that. A disgusted "Yah!" sounded from a hundred throats, and a big fellow in a leather apron sprang forward and struck one of the horses a stunning blow over the head with his cudgel. The poor beast staggered and fell, bringing his fellow down with him.

Brian gave the order to fire over the heads of the rioters, who backed away at the sound of the volley. Then, seeing its harmless intent, they surged back with a yell of derision, and enveloped the little car like a swarm of ants overrunning the dead body of a beetle.

The soldiers fought valiantly, but they were only twenty men to hundreds, and in less time than it takes to tell they were overpowered. Their rifles were wrested from them. Some of them were murdered in cold blood and hanged upon lamp-posts or street signs, beside the bodies of negroes.

A few of the soldiers escaped, Brian among them, fighting their way through the crowd with their fists, and helped by the gathering darkness.

All night the riot raged, and far into the following day. It was about noon when Brian, who had not slept or eaten, was ordered off duty for rest. He could find no rest, however, before assuring himself of the safety of Miss Van Studdiford, who was alone in a part of the town where there had been many fires.

When he reached their house, he found it deserted; but upon the hall table there was a note telling him that Mr. Cutting had sent his landau for Miss Van Studdiford, and that she was staying at the house on Washington Square until the riot should be quelled.

Walking as if in a hypnotic trance, Brian made his way toward the Cutting residence. His uniform was soiled and torn, his face blackened by smoke and smeared with blood. He noted subconsciously the devastation through which he went—smoking and blackened ruins, where yesterday there had been tall and stately buildings; benches upset in the parks, and trampled grass; ghastly black bodies hanging from posts and street signs—bodies which no one had dared to cut down; scattered groups of



yelling, wild-eyed rioters, not yet satiated with their triumph.

It was all like a mad, impossible dream to Brian as he stumbled along, his only thought to be assured of the safety of those he loved before seeking rest or food.

Washington Square was practically deserted, and the barracks were empty, except for a few men left on guard. It seemed peaceful and quiet there, and Brian felt an almost irresistible impulse to sink upon the trampled turf and surrender himself to sleep.

Then, suddenly, he heard the sinister howl of an unbridled mob, the hateful sound which had been in his ears all night. Around the corner from Fifth Avenue he saw a group of men running in pursuit of a negro, who carried a basket from which articles were falling as he ran. It was old Joe, the Cuttings' butler, who had ventured out for provisions!

With a start Brian awoke from his walking trance. Yelling, he sprang across the street and stood between the fleeing negro and his pursuers.

The mob held back a bit, daunted for a moment by the pistol which Brian flourished. Old Joe gained the stoop, stumbled up the steps, and fumbled at the front door.

The happenings of the next few moments were so rapid that Brian was scarcely conscious of them. In swift succession came the sudden rush of the thwarted mob, his threat to shoot, the stinging impact of a stone upon his cheek, the click of a trigger, and the sickening realization that his weapon was empty. He backed up the steps. He could hear Joe's hoarse, strangled breathing behind him. The negro could not get the key into the lock, being too much overcome by fright to control his trembling hands.

Some soldiers were running across the street, but already a cudgel was poised above Brian's head. He heard a woman's scream, and two slender arms were extended over him, as if in benediction—two arms which received the impact of the descending cudgel with a sickening sound of breaking bones. Then Brian lapsed into unconsciousness.

When he came to his senses, he found himself lying upon a sofa in the Cuttings' drawing-room. He looked up into Edith's eyes, which were brimming with tears. Aunt Van stood beside him with something

in a glass, her hand trembling so that the liquid was spilling upon the floor.

Edith put her arm about his shoulders and raised him a little, laying her soft cheek against his bruised face.

He saw a group over by the front window—Dr. Elbridge, and Mr. and Mrs. Cutting, and a little woman who sat there, very still and white, while her arm was being bandaged.

Brian tried to struggle to his feet, but found himself too weak to rise. He saw that the little woman upon whom the doctor was working had her eyes upon him, with a glad light in them. She seemed totally oblivious to what they were doing to her arm.

"Ellen saved your life, Brian," said Edith. "She took the blow upon her poor arm. Oh, dear Ellen!"

She ran across the room and sank upon her knees before her old nurse.

With an effort Brian rose and followed her, his knees trembling like those of a child learning to walk. Miss Van Studdiford clung to his arm. She seemed to want to hold him back.

"There, there, Edith!" said Mr. Cutting, a trifle testily. "How is the doctor to finish if you crowd about like this?"

"I'm all through," said the doctor, stepping back to yield his place to Brian. "I'll say for Ellen that she's the gamest wounded soldier I've ever handled."

"'Tis nothing," said Ellen. "I scarce feel the pain now."

"You shouldn't have—why did you?" stammered Brian. "You might have been killed!"

Ellen looked down upon her arm. She couldn't meet the grateful, concerned look in the boy's eyes.

"What's a broken arm?" she said. "My Miss Edith's heart would have been broken, otherwise."

"And that's true," said the doctor. "Even that glancing blow, which she deflected, left a pretty bad gash on your forehead, young man."

Brian put his hand up to the bandage upon his head. He had not been conscious of it before, but there was a dull, aching pain there.

"The full force of that cudgel would have cracked your skull," said the doctor emphatically. "You certainly owe your life to this little woman!"

At this Miss Van Studdiford began to

cry. In fact, she became hysterical, and it required the attention of the doctor and of every one else in the room to quiet and soothe her.

### XIII

By noon of the following day the city had been brought to its normal state by the help of emergency troops which had been hastened there from a camp in New Jersey.

Permission had been gained for Brian to stay at the Cuttings' house for rest and recuperation, and Mrs. Cutting had invited a few friends to an informal luncheon, at which the engagement between Brian and her daughter was to be announced. Social activities were not entirely suspended at that time in New York, the war not having touched many families closely as yet.

The luncheon was to be a small affair, Judge Deems, Dr. Elbridge, and a few young friends of Edith's being the only guests outside of the family connections.

The table in the big dining room was gayly and patriotically decorated with flags, and there were many flowers from the small conservatory that jutted out in a bow from the back of the room.

Brian, feeling very little the worse for his experiences during the riot, was seated at Mrs. Cutting's right. He still wore a bandage about his head, and rather ruefully received the congratulations of his friends at having come through his first battle with so little hurt. He felt a little ashamed that it had been a cudgel in the hands of a rabble, rather than a rifle or sword in the hands of the enemy, which had left its mark upon him.

He wished that Aunt Van, who was seated upon his right, would not so often call attention to him by solicitous inquiries as to how he felt, and whether he was sure he was strong enough to sit up.

He thought about Ellen, whom he had not seen since the day before. He felt that she should be brought in and hailed as the real hero of the occasion.

The luncheon party began to be rather gay. There was wine, most of the guests were young, and the war seemed very far away.

On the appearance of the dessert, Mr. Cutting rose with a wineglass in his hand, and paused, smiling, as old Joe approached the group of servants assembled in the doorway. They had been sent for to drink

a toast, with the guests, to the health and happiness of the young couple, as was the custom in that family. They stood in a giggling, embarrassed little group as Joe passed the tray with glasses among them.

"Friends," said Mr. Cutting, when the glasses were all filled, "it gives me great pleasure to announce the engagement of my daughter, Edith, to our gallant young friend, Lieutenant Van Studdiford. I think I may say without undue complacency that the contemplated union of members of two old and honorable families"—he waved his glass in the direction of Miss Van Studdiford, who looked very uncomfortable—"is most gratifying to Mrs. Cutting and myself."

The thoughts of every one at the table went to young Richard Cutting, the son, who was not present at the luncheon. He had married beneath him. His wife, the daughter of a small tradesman, had never been recognized by the family, which had an inordinate pride of caste.

"I ask you all to join me," Mr. Cutting went on, "in a toast to the health, long life, and happiness of my daughter and my future son-in-law!"

As the glasses were raised and drained, there came a long and imperative ringing of the front doorbell. It sounded ominous, somehow, coming at that moment.

It was ominous! An orderly had come with the news that Lee had invaded Pennsylvania, that the Tenth Regiment had been ordered to the front, and that Lieutenant Van Studdiford was to report at the armory at once.

It was as if a bomb had exploded in that safe, luxurious room. Consternation struck them all into a shocked silence. The enemy in Pennsylvania! The war so near at last! There was no sound, for a moment, as faces grew white and frightened eyes stared at the bringer of such evil news.

Suddenly Miss Van Studdiford shrieked and threw her arms about Brian, crying that she would not let him go. He tried to comfort her. Then, putting her aside into sympathetic arms, he faced Edith, who stood looking at him dumbly, stricken, trying to call a brave smile to her stiffened lips.

As Brian took her in his arms, over her head he saw a white face, which seemed to stand out in unnatural distinctness from the blur of other white faces. It was Ellen's face, old, lined, wistful, with a look in

her eyes which he could scarcely meet for the pain and suffering that it expressed.

Scarcely realizing what he was doing, he kissed Edith, surrendered her to her father's arms, and went toward the old woman by the door. He was drawn by an irresistible impulse, not knowing what he meant to do or say.

"You—you—" he stammered. "You mustn't leave her. She loves you. They said you were going to leave. She cried about it. She doesn't want you to go. You won't, will you?"

Ellen shook her head dumbly.

"I'd like to think she had you if—anything happened," he went on. "She—"

He could find no further words. Ellen's eyes were upon him with a hungry, possessive, yet renouncing gaze, which choked the words in his throat. They stood there gazing at each other.

Miss Van Studdiford tugged at Brian's arm. He looked down upon the anxious old face without clearly recognizing, at first, who it was that claimed his attention. There was a look in her eyes which he had never seen before—a new light of unselfish impulse.

"I can't stand it!" she said, not looking at him, but at Ellen. "You—you—it isn't fair! The whole burden! Tell him! Tell him!"

With a tremendous effort Ellen gathered her scattered wits together. She saw that Miss Van Studdiford was upon the point of ruining the whole work of her long years of self-denial, and of shaming Brian by betraying his humble parentage before that proud company.

"You must stand it, madam," she said, purposely misinterpreting the import of Miss Van Studdiford's words. "Your son must do his duty. Go, go quickly," she said to Brian. "Do not prolong your mother's suffering!"

"Yes! Yes! I must go at once," answered Brian, wondering at the commanding look this humble woman had given the other. "Don't fret," he said to Miss Van Studdiford. "I'll be back before you know it—mother!"

He turned and hastily shook the hands of the guests, and then, with another kiss and embrace for Edith and his adopted mother, he went hastily from the room. In a moment the front door banged, and he was gone.

Every one gathered about Edith and

Miss Van Studdiford, trying to comfort and reassure them.

Ellen crept to the front window. Was that Brian striding across the park? She wasn't sure—there were so many blue uniforms and sturdy figures there.

"Ellen! Ellen!" Edith was beside her. Ellen put her good arm about the girl, who nestled to her side. "Say you'll stay, Ellen! Say you won't leave me now!"

"I'll stay, deary. Yes, I'll stay!"

They stood there for a long time, and then Mr. Cutting came and took Edith away. He said the carriage was ready. They were going to drive down to the ferry to see the regiment depart.

Presently Ellen stood again at the window, alone. She saw them driving away—Mr. and Mrs. Cutting, Miss Van Studdiford, and Edith. Then she went painfully upstairs, where she put on her shabby old bonnet and shawl. She, too, meant to see the regiment go away.

She felt strangely calm as she gave orders in the kitchen for dinner that night, and then went quietly out by the garden gate.

No one noticed the shabby figure hastening down Broadway, jostled and shoved this way and that by the crowd, which grew more and more dense as she made her way down town. On Cortlandt Street, which led to the ferry, the sidewalks were packed with excited people, waiting to see the Tenth march by.

Ellen wormed her way through the press, guarding her bandaged arm as well as she could, though several times it was severely pressed upon and hurt. Soon her shawl was pulled away from her shoulders. Mechanically she grasped the end of it in her free hand.

There was a keen wind blowing from the river, but she did not feel it. Her bonnet was knocked to the back of her head, and wisps of gray hair blew over her eyes. She was conscious of nothing but the determination to get to the end of the street, where she might gain a vantage point from which to look upon her boy's face once again.

She heard the shrill sound of fifes and the roll of drums, and felt the crowd pack more and more tightly about her. The regiment was coming!

She was being hurt, terribly hurt, by the pressure, but she was scarcely conscious of it. She could see nothing but heads and shoulders, being a little woman.

There was a sound of marching feet, and



a band broke into a gay tune. The crowd squeezed closer and more close. A woman screamed and fainted and went down, unheeded by the crowd. Ellen, half conscious, grasped at the arm of a big man in fear of her to keep herself from falling, too.

A good-natured face looked down upon her.

"Hey, old lady, hey!" the man shouted. "This is no place for you!"

"My son!" she gasped. "My son! I must see him!"

The man thrust out with his big arms, elbowing right and left to make room for her, calling:

"Easy there! Let the old lady by! Somebody's mother wants to get a look! Easy there!"

Sheltering her with his great bulk, he pushed Ellen through the crowd to the edge of the curb.

Many soldiers were marching by. They looked dim and shadowy to her. She wondered confusedly why it had grown dark so suddenly.

People were cheering. Hats were flying in the air. Flowers were falling under the feet of the marching men. Dim soldiers were passing by, all looking alike to Ellen—pale and shadowy, as if in a dream.

Company after company passed. The little figure lurched against the big man, who put his arm about her, to keep her from being pushed from the curb.

As she rested there in the hollow of that strong arm, there came to her a burst of glorious music. A great chorus it seemed, shouting:

"Hallelujah! Hallelujah!"

There was a bright light all about her, and the arm that held her so closely was her own boy's arm. How good it was to feel the embrace for which she had hungered for so many years!

It seemed to her that he lifted her face to his and gazed long into her eyes, and that the name "Mother Machree" formed upon his lips.

The moment was pure bliss!

"This is enough!" she said. "This pays for all!"

"Easy there! Easy there!" said the big man, as he felt the little figure crumple within his arm. "Easy there! The old lady has fainted!"

After the regiment had passed by, a doctor forced his way through the crowd to where the big man still held Ellen's slender form. He looked at the peaceful face with the joyous smile upon it, and took off his hat.

"It isn't a faint," he said. "She's gone."

"Gone!" said the man who held her. "I wonder what she saw! That look on her face! It can't be so bad, going like that."

THE END

#### RELEASE

For many a year did I with Sorrow bide—  
Old haunting Sorrow, gray and hollow-eyed;  
He dogged my steps where'er I turned to go,  
If I trod swift or slow.

If in the night I dreamed that he were gone,  
I felt his presence by me in the dawn;  
The spell he cast upon me in close wise  
I could not exorcise.

I thrust him from me, but without avail;  
Like the grim seaman of the Persian tale  
Did he bestride my neck and clutch and cleave,  
And grant me no reprieve.

And then Love came upon a radiant day;  
Sorrow with shriveled face slunk fast away;  
Now I am safe from all his cruel harms  
Within Love's shielding arms!

Clinton Scollard

# The Twisted Foot

A STORY OF ROMANCE AND ADVENTURE IN THE GREAT WEST

By William Patterson White

Author of "The Owner of the Lazy D," "The Rider of Golden Bar," etc.

IN the bunk house of the Eighty-Eight Ranch, Bill Holliday, cowboy, raised his cheerful voice to greet the morn with song:

"I looked over Jordan, and what did I see  
Coming for to carry me home?  
A band of angels coming for me—  
Coming for to carry me home!"

"You're mistaken, Bill," declared his cousin, Buff Warren, when the singer paused to take breath for the next verse. "That wasn't any band of angels you saw. That was a posse, and I wish to Gawd they'd caught you and hung you good! Can't you sing without making all that noise?"

"If he could, he'd be in grand opera," snorted freckled-faced Bat Allen, from the depths of the bunk house towel.

"What say we throw him out?" suggested Tile Stanton, who was sitting on the edge of his bunk, pulling on his trousers.

"I'd like to see you try throwing me out!" cried Bill Holliday, reaching purposefully for Tile, but colliding, instead, with Buff Warren.

The latter seized Bill whole-heartedly, and they wrestled each other across the room and fell headlong over the doorsill. The more agile Buff, having contrived to roll Holliday and put him face downward in the grass, turned to shout for Tile, but paused with his mouth open. Within twenty feet of him there was a girl—a girl on a horse, a pretty girl with honey-colored hair and amber eyes, a girl who made him think of home, and the blue Pennsylvania hills, and cowbells tinkling through the dusk, and mountain laurel, and the sweet scent of the "honeyshucks" along a dusty road.

It did not strike Buff, at the moment, that the horse she rode was thin, or that she was shabbily dressed in a man's shirt, an old skirt patched over one knee, and scuffed boots. No, the significance of these things did not sink in, because when he glimpsed her she pushed back on her hatless head the mop of honey-colored hair, and smiled upon him sweetly.

Buff immediately felt a warm, cheery sensation permeate his breakfastless being. As he smiled back, he absent-mindedly ground his cousin's nose a trifle deeper into the grass.

"Good morning," said the girl in a voice that was own fellow to the smile. "Have you seen anything of a gray mule around here?"

"Is this it?" he asked idiotically, jerking his chin at the man he was holding down, for the warm, cheery sensation was affecting his brain like raw whisky, only more pleasantly. "Is this it?" he repeated to her stare of surprise.

The smile had left the girl's face, but two dimples had come instead.

"No," she said, with a serious shake of her head.

"I expect your mule had four legs," said Buff, becoming totally unmindful of the fact that there was work to do that day. "I—I—if you'll wait a shake, I'll get my horse and help hunt that mule."

"I can't let you do that," she said with finality, and picked up her bridle. "I guess the mule didn't come this far, anyway. So long!"

She gave him a friendly nod, and kicked her thin mount into a trot. Buff remained where he was, staring after that honey-colored head.

"My gosh!" he said. "My gosh!"

The voice of Bill Holliday filtered through the grass in a rabid snarl.

"It 'll be my Gawd and some more yet if you don't lemme up!"

Buff abstractedly released the arm that he held bent over the small of his cousin's back, and arose. His cousin arose, too, muttering curses and rubbing the aforementioned arm.

"What you trying to do—break my arm? If that girl hadn't been there, I'd have—"

He paused. Words failed him.

Buff seized him by the shoulder.

"Did you ever see anything like her?" he demanded eagerly.

His cousin twitched away with a cry.

"That's the shoulder you almost put out of joint!" he snapped. "A joke's a joke, damn it all, but you're too much of a humorist!"

Buff Warren cast a glance over his shoulder at the bunk house. From the open doorway came the brisk chatter of Bat Allen arguing anent the merits of his pet pony. Evidently none of the Eighty-Eight boys had witnessed either the arrival or the departure of the girl on the thin horse.

"Calling me a mule in front of her!" grumbled Holliday, boiling over with his grievance. "What you do it for? I've a good mind to bust you one for luck!"

Buff held up a restraining hand.

"Be calm—be very calm. I have some news for you." He came close, and, when the touchy William shied away, he plucked him by the sleeve. "You see that girl?" he continued. "You see that girl?" he repeated in a still more earnest tone, when his cousin blinked at him.

"Yeah," said Holliday crossly. "I see her."

"Take a good look at her. She's my girl, she is!"

"Your girl?" exclaimed Bill.

"Mine," Buff declared firmly.

"Who is she?" demanded Bill, much interested.

"I don't know."

"But you said—"

"And I meant every word I said," averred Buff, regarding his mystified relative with some truculence.

Holliday batted his eyes.

"If she's your girl, you'd ought to know who she is!"

"How could I know? I never saw her before."

"You never saw her before!" Holliday repeated, bewilderedly. He put up a stiffened forefinger and rotated it beside his left ear. "Wheels! Hear 'em buzz! Or else you're drunk. If so," he added hopefully, "where did you hide the bottle?"

Buff paid Holliday no further attention. Legs spread, hands on hips, he stood at gaze and beamed. Honey-colored hair and amber eyes—the Pennsylvania hills—the honeysuckles, the—

"I ain't deaf," he said coldly to his cousin.

"You sure act like it! I only repeated myself four times in your ear. I want to get this straight, Buff. You never saw this girl before, but she's your girl. How do you explain it, and does she know it?"

"I can't, and she don't, but she will."

With this apparently cryptic remark, Buff turned and entered the kitchen in obedience to the cook's bawl of—

"Come and get it!"

"Ub-glub-blub-blah," Alonzo Peters announced brightly, in the middle of his breakfast.

"I think so, too," assented Buff. "In fact, we're all with you, Lonzo."

"Lonzo's gone back to his happy childhood," said Tile Stanton.

"First I knew he ever left it," said Buff.

"Take another mouthful, Lonzo," suggested Dan Gildersleeve kindly. "Then maybe I can understand you."

"Talking and eating are two men's work," said Buff. "Lonzo ought to be twins."

"Tain't necessary," snarled Jimmy, the cook. "He eats more than any six men right now."

Alonzo swallowed hard, constrictor-like, drank half a cup of coffee at a gulp, sighed deeply, and said:

"I hear the Twisted Foot got Cobway of Marysville and nine hundred dollars three days ago."

"The son of a gun!" exclaimed Buff. "Who told you?"

"Rum. I saw him just now when I went up to the office for tobacco."

"That makes nine he's beefed in four years," said the Kid's Twin.

"Ten," corrected Bill Holliday; "and Gawd only knows how many holdups when there wasn't a burial. He's sure a side-winder, that fellah! Pass the salt, will you, Kid?"

The arrival of a fresh plate of steaks dis-



tracted their attention, and they forgot for the nonce the Twisted Foot, the most famous criminal of the Territory. The popular name of this mysterious malefactor was derived from the fact that while the track of the murderer's left boot was in every way normal, that of the right one, instead of curving properly to the left, bent to the right.

The Twisted Foot confined his criminal activities to holdups—stage and individual. He robbed women as well as men. As Bill Holliday said, at least ten leading citizens within the past four years had been found murdered and robbed by this unknown but formidable ruffian, who always left near the body of his victim a few of his peculiar boot marks and a cigarette butt or two of the peculiar "saddleblanket" papers of the Southwest.

Scarcely a month passed without its hold-up by the Twisted Foot. There were other holdups by other talent, but these were spur-of-the-moment, negligible affairs, in which small sums had been taken. The robberies of the Twisted Foot were always for large amounts. He seemed to have an uncanny faculty of determining whose poke was full of gold eagles.

When the Twisted Foot did not kill, it was his harsh custom to wound. He invariably shot from behind. Despite this cowardly propensity, coupled with his habit of running away when the odds were against him, he could fight, and fight well, when the issue was forced upon him. Once, when cut off and surrounded by the Sunset County sheriff and three deputies, he had fought the four to a standstill, killing two deputies, badly wounding the third, and grazing the sheriff.

Following that set-to, he had escaped, as usual. He always escaped, and people had come to believe that he always would. So elusive were the movements of the Twisted Foot that a ghostly character would have been attributed to him, were it not for the dead bodies of his victims. A ghost does not use firearms.

## II

BUFF, saddling in the corral after breakfast, was not nearly as happy as the proverbial clam. In spite of the confident remarks he had made to his cousin, he could not quite fathom how he was going to ever see that girl again, much less make her his own.

"Idiot!" he told himself, his head under the left fender. "Idiot! I always did ford the creek before I reached it. Hold still, you four-legged accordion!"

But the four-legged accordion had a mind of his own. It was several minutes before Buff could pass the cinch strap in the last turn, make his loop, and pull it tight. The others had all left the corral when he led out and closed the gate.

"Hey, Buff!"

He looked up. Rum Gordon, the foreman, was walking toward him from the ranch house. Behind Rum came his brother-in-law, Sam Caltrop, manager and majority stockholder of the Eighty-Eight.

"What you doing to-day, Buff?" asked Rum.

"Farewell, you told me, for the mail."

"Sure enough—I forgot. Well, on your way back, I wish you'd stop at McFluke's old place and tell any nesters you find there to travel."

"First I heard there's any there."

"Tim Page, of the Bar S, told me yesterday. He saw 'em when he passed that way hunting stray horses. Anyway, they've got to drag it."

"And make it strong, Buff," chipped in Sam Caltrop. "I believe in the golden rule, and I'm the last man to be hard on anybody, but I can't have nesters on the range. Sooner have the itch!"

"All right," said Buff shortly, and topped his mount.

The horse, a red-tempered blue, went up like a shot. Buff socked home the spurs and laced him across the nose with his quirt. The brute sneezed, and began to sidewheel it.

"Quit it!" Buff grated between set teeth. "Quit it! I don't feel like fooling any. You will, huh? All right—let her slipper!"

He raked the horse's flanks with the spurs till they looked like a plowed field. The blue rocketed over the landscape with all the verve and abandon of a distracted jack rabbit. Then, the prodding spurs weakening the jest of the performance, the horse's frantic fury died; but Buff would not have it so.

"No, no, Blue Grass—no easy little road gait for you!" he cried, and thoroughly whanged the blue behind the saddle. "You wanted to hop, so hop!"

But hopping was now the last thing desired by the tormented blue. He ran as

only a cow horse can. When Buff slowed him down under a cut bank, three miles from the ranch house, he was a very good horse.

Buff rolled a cigarette one-handed, snapped a match into flame with his thumb nail, and lit the brown roll. He inhaled deeply, coughed, choked on an expletive, and snatched at his hat, which was on the point of parting company with his black hair.

The cough, the choke, and the snatch had been called forth by a frenzied side leap of Blue Grass. Buff stayed with his horse, but his head snapped on his neck with a force that made it ache.

The cause of the shy was the rattling descent of the cut bank by another horse and rider. Buff dragged his mount to a standstill. A gleam of pleasure lit his eye when he recognized the rider.

"Howdy, Rainbow?" said he, and dragged off his hat. "Might as well kill a man as scare him to death."

"I wanted to see how well you rode," replied Rainbow, smiling mischievously. "You'll make a rider yet. What did you try to choke the horn for?"

"You never saw me pulling leather," said he, with a grin. "Where you going?"

"Over to see Mame. She home?"

Mame was Sam Caltrop's wife. She and Rainbow, the half-breed niece of those highly respectable redskins, Willie's Old Brother-in-Law and his two sisters, Two Cloud and Little Deer, were as friendly as the proverbial kittens in a basket.

It may be said, in passing, that Rainbow was a handsome girl with an excellent figure and a complexion no darker than that of the average brunette. She never acted like a true Indian. Her stoicism, among other aboriginal attributes, had completely vanished. She had gone to school in a convent for six years, and could keep house as well or better than Mame Caltrop herself. She spent her summers with her uncle and aunts in their tepees on the range or the reservation, her winters with her father, Peter Fernald, a storekeeper in Marysville. Her mother was dead.

So much for Rainbow.

"Yep," said Buff, "Mame's home. You go see her. Go right in the kitchen and make a batch of raisin pies, and when I get home you give 'em to me, and I'll give you a bright, new, shiny dime. How's that for high?"

"Too high for me to see, Buffy. You and your raisin pies! When it comes to eating, you remind me of the bottomless pit. Heard the news? No, real news. No catch about it."

"I'll bite," hesitated the suspicious puncher.

"Rafferty's dead."

"No! Is he?" exclaimed Buff, for Rafferty was the sheriff's chief deputy, and a personage in the county. "Who killed him?"

"Acute toxic coma, complicated by a fracture of the cervical vertebrae, so Doc Homer said; but it looked to me like plain, old-fashioned D.T.'s and the broken neck he got when he fell out the window of Lainey's Hotel. Doc ought to have known better than to leave Rafferty alone when he gets that way. He'll know better next time—the nitwit!" she added vindictively, not so much because she deplored the removal of Rafferty as because she detested inefficiency.

"I suppose the sheriff has shoved up that featherbed, Nap Tobias, to chief deputy, and appointed Rupe Wilton to the vacancy. He always did want the job."

"Yes to the first, no to the second," said Rainbow. "Rupe got a job on the railroad last week—Piegan City. I wish I was a man!"

"I don't. You make too good-looking a girl."

"Don't you try to feed me sugar! I know you, you flirt! Anyway, I wish I was a man. Why do I wish I was a man? I wish I was a man so I could go to Mr. Sheriff Joe Mack and strike him for that deputy's job."

Buff Warren was moved to laugh.

"I don't think much of your ambition," he told her bluntly. "What's a second deputy? A little less than half o' nothing."

Her black eyes sparkled with irritation.

"A job is what you make of it. Just because Nap Tobias always was a figure-head, like Rafferty, it don't signify that he has to be one. No, if he had any gump—but he hasn't, not a bit; and the sheriff runs his office to suit himself."

"And his friends."

Her scorn was superb.

"And his friends—his highly honorable friends! Oh, you men! You're a putrid lot!"

"Here, what's biting you?" demanded Buff. "What did I ever do?"

"Nothing—that's just it. You're like all the rest of the bunch. You don't amount to anything, you never will amount to anything, and, what's more, you don't want to amount to anything. Would you turn your hand to right a wrong? Not you! So long as you get three meals a day and don't freeze to death, you've got the comfortable idea that all the rest of the world is well fed and warm as toast. Oh, you men! You make me sick!"

"You've been reading those dime novels again," Buff remarked placidly, "and somebody has been feeding you raw meat."

"I'd enjoy boxing your silly ears!" snarled Rainbow. "I'll bet I know where you're going this minute. You're going to McFluke's old place, to tell the Fairs to get out."

"You'd lose. I ain't going there till tomorrow morning. Is Fair the name of those nesters?"

"Yes, Fair's the name of those nesters. It's a shame Caltrop doesn't run a fence around the whole Territory, and be done with it. You'd think he owned the earth, the way he acts—the skinflint! Mame's all right, and I like her, but her husband will pinch a dollar till Liberty goes black in the face!"

"Outside of that, he's all right, huh?"

"And I suppose you'll enjoy the job of telling 'em to drift."

"We-ell, I don't know that I'll enjoy it, exactly," Buff defended himself weakly; "but you know how it is yourself, Rainbow—we can't have nesters balling up the range till you can't turn around, and rustling our cattle. What with wolves, and coyotes, and lions, it's bad enough now. A fellah has to make a profit."

Rainbow set her stubborn chin.

"It's free range."

"Sure it is—for the cattlemen."

"For everybody."

He shook his head.

"You're wrong there. We were here first."

"And of course that—oh, what's the use of arguing with a mule? All I have to say is that it's a crying shame, and I wish I was a man for about six months! I'd show 'em!"

"And in the meantime, Rainbow, while you're busy wishing for the moon thisaway, you might tell me something. You know everybody and everything in the county, just about. Do you know a girl with

brown-goldy-yellow hair, amber-colored eyes, and a bay horse, kind of thin, with two white feet and a wall eye? And she wears a white handkerchief with three blue stripes on the border round her neck."

Rainbow dropped her eyelids. When she raised them again, there was an odd glint in the depths of her black eyes. When she spoke to Buff Warren, the harsh note had completely vanished from her voice. She almost cooed like a dove.

"Brown-goldy-yellow hair with three blue stripes, you say? About thirty or forty years old, isn't she?"

"No, she isn't she, smarty! Girl about twenty, I guess."

"About twenty!" mused Rainbow, finger on lip. "And she's kind of thin, with a wall eye and two white feet!"

"That was the horse, I told you!"

"Please excuse me. Don't mumble your words next time. Yes, I think I know the blue-striped girl you mean—the wall-eyed horse, too, for that matter. I suppose you want to find the girl so you can buy the horse. Is that the idea?"

"Something like that. Where she live?"

"I wonder do you really want to know?"

"What do you suppose I keep asking you for?"

"I hoped you were doing it as an excuse to talk to me. I see I was mistaken. My heart is broken. I'll never believe another man again—never!"

"Listen here, Rainbow," said Buff in his most wheedling tone. "Quit your deviling, there's a good girl, and tell Buffy what he wants to know."

"Wouldn't you like me to?"

"And they say women were put into the world to be a help! Rainbow, I wish I was your pa for ten minutes. I do so!"

"All right," said Rainbow. "I'll tell you"—Buff's face lightened like a sunrise—"but not to-day"—sunset and evening star. "Come around to-morrow, Buff, and, if you still want to know, I'll tell you then. Tell you what I will do," she added, ignoring his protests. "I'll make a bet with you. Oh, shut up! Don't be such an infernal baby! Anybody would think you were three years old, the way you act. If you can't have what you want when you want it, you sulk and kick the furniture. This bet, now—I'll bet you the best split-ear bridle in the Blue Pigeon store that you don't run off the Fairs."

"Won't I? You'll see!"



"Caltrop may, but you won't have a hand in it."

"You mean they'll try to rub me out?"

"No, I don't. They're not that kind. They're good people. I mean what I say—you won't be a party to running them off."

"The best split-ear in the Blue Pigeon! Can I pick it out myself?"

"If you win."

"The little hoss is wearing it already. Your camp still in Rattlesnake Draw? Good enough! I'll be around to-morrow to find out where that girl is at, and to tell you I won the bet. So long!"

Rainbow tickled her horse into a trot.

"What cocksure fools men are!" she said aloud. "I know the very bridle I'm going to have!"

Buff, with the ranch mail in a gunny sack on his saddle and one of the Canton's best meals under his belt, went into the Starlight Saloon for something to top off with. He found the place empty of customers, and Hilario Chavez, the Mexican bartender, in process of being fired by Mrs. Fernie, the proprietor.

"It isn't that you don't take in enough cash," complained the owner, who was behind the bar, while the bartender was in front of it; "but you don't put enough into the till. You can drag it—now!"

"Is that so?" said the bartender, who, like his erstwhile employer, was unconscious that a guest had entered. "Is that so? Where's my money?"

"There."

A little heap of gold and silver lay on the top of the bar. As she spoke, the lady pushed the pile toward the man—which action was evidently what he had been waiting for. He seized her wrist and pulled her forward and partly across the bar. A knife appeared in his right hand.

"I go," he chuckled, "but I'll take something with me besides my wages—your beauty! Scream, I slit your throat. Ah-h-h!"

The tailpiece of his remarks was caused by Buff jamming the muzzle of his six-shooter into the small of the Mexican's back.

"The knife, Hilario!" murmured Buff, his hand on the other's collar. "Lay it down, and let the lady go. That's right! You're a sensible man, I see, and would like to depart in peace, not in pieces. I don't hear you laugh. You should cultivate a sense of humor, Hilario. It will

help you over many a rough place, just as I'm going to help you over this doorsill!"

While he kept up his steady flow of conversation, Buff had been propelling Chavez toward the door, which was open. With an accurately placed toe, he kicked Chavez through the doorway. The man, his body bowed outward, skittered across the sidewalk and fell on his face in the roadway. Buff stood in the doorway, watching him, as he scrambled to his feet and dusted himself with angry spats of the hand.

"Here's your knife, Hilario," said Buff, and tossed him the blade—in two pieces.

Chavez looked at the broken blade. He looked at Buff and Buff's gun. Then he went elsewhere. The cowboy did not go back into the saloon until he was out of sight.

There was more than admiration in Mrs. Fernie's handsome eyes when he again faced the bar and herself. She stretched a cool hand out to him.

"You certainly have the knack of coming at the right time!" said she. "That Chavez animal is a dirty little rat. He had me so I couldn't reach the gun in the drawer. Shake!"

He shook, and smiled upon her; but he withdrew his fingers from her clasp sooner than she would have wished. Almost any other man of the neighborhood would have proved more complaisant; for Lil Fernie was a widow with all a widow's ways, a figure, a gorgeous mop of red hair, her own complexion, and a temper which she was clever enough, as a rule, to ride on the curb. Besides being a fairly good business woman, except upon those rare occasions when her rather ardent heart dictated to her otherwise cool head, she knew what was what and on which side her bread was buttered. It may be said that since her husband's demise she had prospered amazingly.

It was this attractive person, then, who had just given thanks to Buff, and who now pushed the customary bottle and glass across the bar.

"Have one with me," Buff invited her politely.

"A short beer, if you don't mind," replied the lady, and drew one that was mainly collar.

"How!" intoned Buff, completing the ritual by looking at Lil over the rim of his glass.

"How!" cooed she, and tossed off her drink at one swallow.

"Have another?" asked Buff.

"One is my limit. Take your hand out of your pocket. It's all on the house. You can't spend a dime in here to-day. *You* have another?"

So Buff had another, but refused a third.

"Two's my limit," said he, with a grin. "I know when to stop."

The lady smiled, and reached for the bottle in such a roundabout way that her wrist touched the back of Buff's hand where it rested on the bar—touched and rested a not too fleeting instant. Although Lil had never before accorded him such an attention, Buff ordinarily would have been gallant enough to have played up properly by turning over his hand and grasping the lady's fingers; but now he hardly noticed the incident. He was too busy thinking of another girl—a girl with amber eyes and honey-colored hair.

Lil was piqued. This did not fit in with a plan of hers—a plan with which she had been flirting for some time, but about which she had not been quite able to make up her mind, until Buff's excellent handling of the Chavez incident had crystallized flirtation into decision. A line appeared between her level brows. The unconscious Buff turned to go. The line was ironed out as if by magic.

"Wait a minute, Buff," said she.

"You're not in a hurry, are you?"

"Not especially," replied Buff, turning back. "Why?"

"I want to talk to you," she told him, her lips curving in an appealing smile.

"I'm lonely."

"Are you?"

"I am. You can't imagine how lonely it is for a widow."

"That's sure tough," said Buff, experiencing a vague unease.

"I like to have a man around the place," pursued the lady, her handsome eyes languishing at him.

"You can easy get another bartender."

"I don't mean a bartender. I mean a man—like—like my husband."

"You'll travel a long way before you find somebody like him. He was a fine fellow!"

"He was," sighed the widow, her eyes demurely downcast. Slowly she raised them and transfixed Buff with a warm stare.

"But there are others."

"I guess there are," admitted Buff.

"Well, I must be going."

"Oh, Buff, wait a minute! There's something I want you to do for me out back."

"Well—"

"Don't you want to help me?" she asked plaintively.

"Why, sure," assented Buff. "Lead me to it."

Lil literally did this when she had closed and locked the street door. She took Buff's hand in her own warm clasp and led him into her private apartment at the south end of the saloon. The manual contact did not thrill Buff, but he felt that it would have been rude to withdraw his fingers. He never was one to tease or annoy a woman. After all, it was only Lil, a good friend of his. He had known her ever since he first came to the Southwest.

Buff looked about him in amazement when he entered Lil's sitting room. To his eyes it was a luxurious apartment; and so it actually was, considering the time and place. On the floor were Jicarilla blankets, fantastic and beautiful. Running across the table in the center of the room were Sioux saddle pockets of buckskin, with fringe ten inches long. On the saddle pockets stood a large nickel-plated lamp with a green, ribbed shade. Ornamenting one end of the table was a buffalo hunter's knife in a beaded, embroidered, and fringed scabbard—the kind of scabbard that is worn inside the belt. On the other end of the table were an ash receiver and the *Rocky Mountain News*.

Beside the table was an army chair of the heavy Southwestern model, its stretch leathers made of bridle reins an inch wide. Across the room at one of the windows was another similar army chair. In front of the other window was a couch covered with a Hopi blanket. Heavy white curtains draped the windows.

On three walls were hung exquisite specimens of Jicarilla saddle blankets. Three large Navaho blankets covered the fourth wall from floor to ceiling. There were no pictures. There was not even a mirror. It was essentially a man's room.

"Sit down over there," said Lil, releasing Buff's hand and indicating the couch. "I'll be back in a minute."

She pulled aside the central blanket of the three covering the end wall, and Buff saw a narrow, doorless doorway giving into another room. When she let the blanket fall behind her, no one would have im-

agined that the wall was not solid. Lil reappeared within the minute, bearing an Indian bowl containing a bag of tobacco, matches, and cigarette papers.

"I didn't know there was a room like this in the whole Territory," he said, as he seated himself on one end of the couch.

"You like it?" she asked, offering the bowl containing the smoker's materials.

He helped himself, and she sat down beside him—with the bowl between them, however.

"Make me one," she commanded, leaning back and crossing her legs.

When he held out the open roll for her to lick, she leaned forward, put out her pink tongue, and ran it along the edge. She sank slowly back, and on her face was the indescribably baffling expression that Leonardo da Vinci painted into the face of Mona Lisa. Buff construed it as a smile. He smiled back, folded down the paper, and handed her the finished cigarette.

"Thanks!" said she. "Now roll yours."

He obeyed, and she showed him how two cigarettes may be lit with one match. When the girl attracts you, this bit of business is not without interest. When the girl does not, it is silly. Buff thought it silly. He began to be a little bored.

"What did you want me to do for you?" he asked, inspecting the glowing end of his cigarette.

"I'll tell you in a moment," said she. "Why, aren't you comfortable?"

"Oh, I'm that all right, but—"

"Do you think it's kind to run away the moment you come in?" pouted the spider to the fly.

"I ain't running away," denied the fly. "I'm staying right here; only, if you've got anything you want me to do, the sooner I do it, the sooner it will be done."

"That's so," murmured the lady. "That rule applies to almost anything, doesn't it?"

So saying, she removed the bowl that lay between them, and edged closer to her prey.

"Buff," she went on, bending forward so that she could look into his face, "I wonder just how much you'd do for—for the person you loved?"

Buff nervously shuffled his feet. He cleared his throat. He grew red.

"I—uh—I dunno. I never thought about it."

She regarded him for a moment in silence. It struck him that her eyes were

a queer gray-green—not the gray-green of water, but the gray-green of rock. What lay beneath their hardness he could not tell; but he knew that whatever it was, he did not like it.

Then, quite suddenly, the hard stare softened. Lil's eyes became liquid and luminous and appealing. Her red lips smiled winsomely at the man beside her. She remained leaning forward. Her eyes continued to hold him. She made a gesture with her right hand.

"You said you liked all this—these things—this room?" she queried.

"Sure do!"

She dropped her hand on his knee.

"And me? How much do you like me?"

Buff immediately broke into a gentle perspiration.

"I like you all right," he mumbled.

The lady laughed.

"Is that the best you can do?"

"I don't know what you mean," lied Buff, heartily wishing himself elsewhere, but lacking the nerve necessary to betake himself there.

"Don't you really know? Why do you suppose I brought you in here? Why do you suppose I've been doing everything in my power to make you notice me?"

Buff goggled at her.

"Wha-what?"

She impatiently nodded her head.

"Buff, do you mean to tell me you have never noticed my attempts to attract your attention?"

"No, I never," he declared hastily. "Honest! If you ain't got anything for me to do, I—"

"Wait!" Her hand upon his knee was compelling. "Don't be so shy. My Lord, if all men were as jumpy as you are! You're not afraid of me, are you?"

"N-n-no."

"Then sit still, Buff. Look at me. No, don't turn your eyes away. Buff, dear, you must know by this time how I feel toward you. You aren't so blind as all that. You can't be. Buff, I never thought I'd marry again—never; but—but—oh, why don't you help me out?"

Buff had not the remotest intention of helping her out. He would have arisen, but one of her hands was bearing down on his knee, while the other grasped his sleeve. The arm of the sofa, slightly curved, held him in on the left side. He was practically penned.



"I—I—" he stuttered, and bogged down like a horse in a quicksand; but he felt more like a steer in the squeezer.

The lady regarded him in silence for a moment, and then continued, in a more controlled tone:

"The Starlight has a good trade, Buff, and I have other interests that bring me in an income. With you as my husband, we'll go a long way. I need a man, and you are that man. Oh, you needn't shake your head at me! I know what I'm doing, and I know what I want. I want you. I—I love you, Buff—really and truly I do. Don't you believe it? Look at me! I'm as young as you are, and where will you find anybody better-looking? I'm true blue, Buff. I'll make you a good wife. I'll—I'll—if you don't love me now, Buff, marry me, and I'll make you love me. You don't know how I can love, Buff! Take me, oh, take me!"

Instead of waiting for him to take her, she took him. Before he could grasp her intention, she flung both arms around his neck and laid her lips to his.

No sooner did her mouth touch his than all nervousness left him. He became instantly cool and practical. With the utmost gentleness he reached back, took hold of her wrists, broke her grip, and forced her hands down into her lap. She gazed at him wide-eyed, open-mouthed.

"You mustn't do this," he told her. "You don't know what you're saying. We'll forget it, Lil."

He slipped out of his seat with a jingle of spur rowels, and reached for his hat. Lil was so silent that he glanced at her. She was sitting stiffly motionless, staring at him, her eyes blank, fixed, ophidian. A rattlesnake he had killed at Mulcher's Gap had looked at him with just such eyes.

"Then you don't want me?" she said in a dull, flat tone.

"I can't, Lil. Honest, I'd like to oblige you, but I can't."

She gave a short, hysterical laugh, and was across the room before he could bat an eye. One of his hands was on the door knob, but she jammed her foot against the door even as she threw both arms around his neck a second time.

"You don't mean it!" she whispered passionately, her breath hot on his chin. "Say you don't mean it, and I'll forgive you! Buff, I can make you happy—happier than any other woman can!"

But all her pleading left Buff as cold as perpetual snow. He felt that he was being made ridiculous. Manlike, he began to be angry.

"Stop it, Lil!" he told her, twisting himself loose from the clasp infolding his neck, and thrusting the lady from him. "I tell you you don't know what you're doing. You—you leave me alone!"

The lady stood off from him. Her hands were balled into fists. Her eyes were more reptilian than ever.

"I—I'll leave you alone!" she declared in a choking voice. "Yes, I will! You'll regret this the longest day you live! I'll see that you regret it, if it's the last thing I do! Get out!"

Buff required no second invitation.

"Deliver me!" he said inwardly, as he went to find his horse. "Is Lil crazy, or what is she?"

He tried to persuade himself that she must have been drunk, but his common sense told him that, allowing for the stress of her emotion, she had been as sober as the soberest justice in the land.

### III

It must be borne in mind that these were the days before the West began to paint its houses; the days when there were more freight wagons than freight trains, and more stage coaches than passenger cars; when a nickel was often mentioned but rarely seen, and the tail went with the hide in any game you chose to play; when a horse cost either five dollars or the expenditure of a little exertion on a moonlight night; when there were three kinds of local law—the kind men bought, the kind they carried in their guns, and the kind whose conception has been attributed to the late Judge Lynch.

If those days were short on morals, they were long on life. People good, bad, and indifferent, male and female after their kind, lived and loved, hated and fought, as prodigally as ever they did in the days when chivalry was more than a name and the side arm was the sword. It was the heyday of the individual. Anything could happen.

Buff Warren, riding to McFluke's old place, regarded the scheme of existence with the vision of one who looks through a glass darkly. He was not sufficiently introspective to grasp the true significance of all that passed, but he was blessed, or

cursed, with the flair for living of a Samuel Pepys, and this helped.

Not, of course, for a single instant, did he realize that he was a tiny chip in a current that was moving swiftly and resistlessly down to a shining sea. His eyes did not perceive the rocks that lay between, nor did his ears hear the roar of many waters—waters that would toss him high and drag him low, lash his soul, wrench his heart, twist his faith into a bitter mockery, and turn his happiness into dusty ashes.

Yet, could he have foreseen what the Three Sisters held in store for him, it is doubtful whether Buff Warren would have turned back. He was as courageous as a Bedlington terrier.

When he came within sight of the gray-brown log and shake shacks and stockade that had been McFluke's stables, shed, and corral, roosting on one end of a short ridge of ground slightly higher than the surrounding flat, he dragged the six-shooter from the holster on his leg and twirled the cylinder, making sure that every chamber but one held a cartridge. Easing down the hammer on the empty chamber, he rode on prepared for whatever might come.

He didn't believe that the nesters would show fight. They would obey orders fast enough. A poor-spirited lot, nesters!

He could not see the ranch house itself. It lay beyond the stable and corral, at the other end of the ridge and below the crest, where there was some protection from the winds that blew in winter.

The sun shone pleasantly, and the sky was as blue as a blond girl's eyes. The cottonwoods and willows that outlined with cool green the banks of the Lazy River, shivered and rustled in the breath of the baby breeze. The fair summer weather, combined with the natural beauty of the spot, would have enraptured a poet. Buff was not a poet, yet he saw that the place was good.

"Dunno that I blame 'em," he muttered, his watchful eyes fixed on the corral and stables. "That sure is just the place for a little ranch."

He walked his horse around the corral, circled the stables, and sighted the gray-brown roof of the ranch house lifting above the butt of the ridge. There was no smoke drifting from the chimney, but some one was chopping wood. He could plainly hear the clear smacks of the steel bit as it split the grain.

"Gil, is that you?"

The voice, which was as deep and rich as an organ tone, came from behind Buff. He checked his horse and turned his head.

He saw a man standing in the doorway of a stable—a man with white hair and a kindly, benevolent face. Here, obviously, was the head of the outfit.

Buff, noting that the ax had ceased to chunk, turned his horse and rode toward the man in the doorway. One of the man's hands rested on the door jamb, the other held a cane.

"Is that you, Gil?" asked the man again.

Buff wondered. The man was looking directly at him.

"No," he said, pulling up in front of the stable door. "I ain't Gil. You living here?"

The man smiled. His face was clean-shaven, and Buff wondered at the extraordinary gentleness of his kindly expression. It made the cowboy feel vaguely uncomfortable. It was as if he had been detected in an act of meanness.

"Yes," said the man in his deep, rich tones. "We are living here. What can I do for you, sir?"

Buff did not reply. He was lost in contemplation of the man's eyes. Not only were they, in their way, as unusual as the stranger's voice—for, in sharp contrast with the bushy white eyebrows above them, they were remarkably black and lustrous—but they were apparently fixed on a point above Buff's hat.

There was something unnaturally stiff about the man's neck and the upward tilt of his chin. His hand dropped from the door jamb, and he took a step forward, the cane touching the ground in front of him as he moved.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he said again, his face upturned, his eyes still fixed on a point above Buff's head.

Moved by a sudden impulse, Buff leaned from the saddle and swept his hand in front of the other's face. The man did not move as the shadow crossed his black eyes. Buff sat up very straight. He knew, now, what was the matter. The man was blind.

Never in all his life had he felt more like a yellow dog. It was one thing to bid a hale and hearty nester to flit; it was quite another to give such orders to this blind man.

He looked down at the man in silence. He was thinking. His thoughts raced, but

notwithstanding that they almost tumbled over themselves, they clearly indicated the fence between whose sides he must choose.

On one side was the custom of the country—the custom he knew, and to which he subscribed as naturally as he breathed. On this side practically all his friends were ranged, in company with that formidable tyrant, public opinion. His life, his habits, his mode of living, everything inclined Buff to this side.

On the other stood this blind man—alone. Of course, the sound of the ax betokened the presence of a wife, and perhaps of children, but Buff did not think of them. He considered only the case of the man before him.

The smile had faded from the lips of the blind man. His face sharpened with a sudden anxiety.

"Who are you?" he asked. "Why don't you speak?"

He did not speak sharply. He did not raise his voice. He stood there, waiting for the other to answer. It struck Buff that this was what the man would be doing to the end of his days—waiting on the pleasure of some one else. In that instant he made his choice.

"What is the matter?" asked the blind man, his anxiety creeping into his voice.

"Nothing's the matter," replied Buff, giving tongue at last. "My name's Warren. What might I call you, sir?"

The blind man's face cleared as if by magic. His smile returned. He shifted his stick and held out his right hand.

"Glad to know you, Mr. Warren. My name's Fair—Abijah Fair. Won't you strip and hobble and come down to the house? Dinner will be ready soon."

Buff hesitated. He was minded to refuse. Although he had made his choice, and no longer felt like a yellow dog, that humiliating sensation had been replaced by one of sulky resentment toward the man who had made his choice necessary.

He knew, however, that what he had started he must see through. This man and his family must be warned of what they might expect; for Caltrop would send another man—several, probably.

"I was wondering what was the matter with me," said Buff. "When you said dinner, I knew I was hungry. Be right with you!"

He hobbled his horse and slipped off saddle and bridle. While he was spreading his

sweaty saddle blanket over his saddle, he saw a bareheaded woman coming from the direction of the ranch house. She carried an ax over her shoulder. Buff thought she had the weariest-looking face he had ever seen.

When she came close to the blind man, she said:

"What is it, dear? I heard you talking, and—"

Her voice trailed off, as she took his white, slender hand in her square, blunt-fingered one.

"This is Mr. Warren, Dora," said Fair. "My wife, Mr. Warren."

Buff straightened, jerked off his hat, came forward, and shook hands. Mrs. Fair gave him a firm grip and a slow smile. Her eyes were as brown as a spaniel's, with the steadfast, questioning look in them that abides in the eyes of those whose paths have been briery and rough.

"He's taking dinner with us, Dora," continued Fair.

"Then we'd better go down to the house," his wife suggested hospitably. "It's cooler indoors."

Fair held her hand as they walked along slowly, and Buff marked how cleverly she guided him around or over the inequalities of the ground. Once he turned his head stiffly in Buff's direction.

"I can't walk very fast," said he. "I don't see as well as I might."

And the man stone blind, as Buff knew!

The cowboy experienced an odd constriction of his throat. He coughed before he spoke.

"Don't have to walk fast on my account. I never do myself."

A faint, irregular thumping noise drifted to Buff's ears. It sounded like some one beating a carpet. The sounds seemed to come from beyond the ranch house.

When they reached the end of the ridge, and the level ground beyond the house became visible, Buff stopped short as if he had been shot. If he had been shot, it is doubtful whether he could have been more unpleasantly surprised. For there, dark brown against the green, lay a good six-acre rectangle of plowed ground. At one corner of the rectangle the plow, with its doubletree hanging drunkenly askew, stood in a furrow.

A plow! Buff had left the stony hill farm in Pennsylvania because of the monotony of plowing and harrowing. He had



come to the cow country, where there were no plows, and where, please God, there never would be any plows; and here was a plow that had already turned under six acres! It was too much.

True, other nesters here and there had started their bits of truck patches before being definitely run out of the country; but none of them had used plows, and their patches had been comparatively insignificant. The ambitious enterprise before Buff's eyes was considerably more than the cowboy had bargained for. Not only was the blind man a nester, he was that unspeakable object, a granger.

Buff suddenly became conscious that the Fairs had halted, and that Mrs. Fair was regarding him with some curiosity.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

Buff took a long breath.

"Nothing," he said, stepping out quickly. "I just happened to think of something, but it doesn't matter. You—you're going to have quite a garden."

"That's going to be more than a garden," said Mrs. Fair, as they walked on. "That's going to be an eight-acre field of corn. We want to get a crop in for winter feed. The garden's in front of the house. You can't see it from here, but you can hear it."

"Hear it?"

"The twins are beating sod."

Buff nodded. That thumping noise! He had once beaten sod for a week, when his father made an addition to their garden. Whack, whack, whack! Shake the grass and throw it aside! Repeat the operation world without end! Yes, indeed—he knew all about the infernal business.

"Step up here, father," said Mrs. Fair, at the kitchen door.

Buff followed them into the kitchen. A long-legged girl of sixteen was standing over the four-hole stove. She was barefooted, snub-nosed, red-headed, and it is doubtful whether another freckle could have been crowded upon her cheerful countenance. She wore her red hair in two long pigtales that flapped about when she moved—which she was doing continually.

"Here's your chair, father," said Mrs. Fair, guiding her husband to a hickory armchair standing between the windows.

"It's the turning that throws me out, Dora," Fair said apologetically. "Those two extra steps have me fooled still; but I'll get it in time."

"Of course you will," Mrs. Fair told him heartily. "You're doing fine. My, the way you get around by yourself!" She slipped an arm around the waist of the girl at the stove, who had been viewing the stranger with the utmost interest. "This is my daughter Jemima, Mr. Warren."

Jemima held out a moist palm and shook hands gravely.

"I'm glad to see you. It's nice to have company."

Buff mumbled something unintelligible, and shuffled his helpless feet. He knew that his face was redder than beetroot. Mrs. Fair saw his distress, and pointed to a chair beside the door.

"Sit down, Mr. Warren," she invited, with her pleasant smile. "Smoke, if you want to."

Buff was glad to do both. Mr. Fair joined him with a pipe.

"See anything of Gil yet, mother?" asked Jemima, dipping a wooden spoon into a salt sack.

"Not yet."

"Gil's been gone a long time."

"It's a big country," struck in Mr. Fair. "I expect Juniper must have traveled some distance."

"I'd travel him!" Jemima cried vindictively, fiercely stirring the contents of the large saucepan. "That animal ain't—isn't worth powder to blow him up!"

"Oh, yes, he is, daughter," Mr. Fair contradicted judicially. "Oh, yes, he is. He'll pull his share of the load every time. You can't hitch him wrong, and he gets into his stride on a cold collar quicker than any—look out, Jem! Hominy's boiling over!"

"I declare, father," exclaimed Jemima admiringly, as she moved the saucepan, "you can hear with your ears quicker than I can see with my eyes!"

The blind face flushed with pleasure at the compliment.

"I'm getting so I can hear pretty well—better than I used to, a lot; but I kind of saw it a little, too, I think."

"Of course you did, father," corroborated Jemima, rushing across to her parent and giving him a brisk hug. "Your eyes are getting better every day—I know they are."

As she turned back to the stove, Buff saw that her eyes were shining and her young mouth was oddly set. Mrs. Fair bent over the wood box. She seemed to

be hunting for something in the bottom. Once she passed her hand quickly across her eyes.

Buff cleared his throat; and with that action, he swallowed, as it were, the plow.

#### IV

BUFF cocked a surprised eyebrow.

"Milk? Real milk?"

"Real milk!" Jemima mimicked his tone to perfection. "And that's cream—for the coffee, you know. You pour it in and stir it around. It gives it a better flavor."

"Jemima!" exclaimed Mrs. Fair. "Mr. Warren is our guest."

Jemima winked at the guest.

"We understand each other, don't we?"

The guest winked back.

"You bet we do. Old friends, we are!"

The twins stared at Buff with solemn, twelve-year-old eyes. Their names were Bob and Bill, diminutives for Robert and Wilhemina. Since both wore boy's style overalls, and their faces were amusingly alike, it was impossible for the casual passer-by to tell them apart.

"We're going to raise beets, carrots, onions, and cabbage in our garden," said one twin to Buff.

"And butter beans, string beans, and green corn," chanted the other.

"I wish I was going to help you," said Buff, and meant it, too.

"We've got a red cow, a red calf, ten heifers, and a bull," said the first twin.

"Do you know how to milk?" asked the second twin.

"Yes," replied Buff, recalling the innumerable times he had squatted on a milking stool and rammed his forehead into a cow's flank. "I sure do know how to milk, all right!"

Milking had been another reason for his leaving home. In his index of distasteful enterprises, milking ranked below plowing.

"You got to do lots of milking, I guess," remarked the first twin.

"I never do any at all," said Buff.

Both twins wrinkled their foreheads. They were pleasant-faced youngsters, with brown eyes and hair.

"Ain't you a cowboy?" they inquired simultaneously.

Buff nodded.

"Something like that."

"But don't you milk your cows none—any, I mean?" demanded the first twin.

"You see, they ain't milking cows," explained Buff. "They're eating cows."

"What's the difference between a milking cow and an eating cow?" the twins wished to know.

"There, there, children, that 'll do," interrupted Mrs. Fair. "Give Mr. Warren a chance to eat his meal in peace. Another cup of coffee, Mr. Warren?"

It was excellent coffee. Buff had another cup. When the dried apple pie was put on the table, he had a third cup to wash down his piece.

After the meal, when he had taken his chair back to the side wall opposite the doorway, for a smoke, the twins attacked him again. The difference between a milking cow and an eating cow had to be explained; so, while they stood one on each side of him, he cleared up the mist that befogged their youthful minds.

"And that's how it is," he concluded, and looked up—looked up into the face of the pretty girl with honey-colored hair and amber eyes, the girl who had made him think of home and the blue Pennsylvania hills and cowbells and mountain laurel and honeysuckles.

But she did not make him think of those things now; for, as she stood squarely in the doorway, it might almost be said that she glared at him. Certainly there was no hint of sweetness in those amber eyes. Rather there was plenty of fire. Her curved brows—it suddenly struck Buff that they were several shades darker than her hair, and that the effect was not displeasing—were drawn together in an unmistakable scowl.

Mr. and Mrs. Fair had gone into another room, but Jemima and the twins were still in the kitchen. The children stared wonderingly at the girl in the doorway, but not so Jemima. She promptly stepped forward to do the honors.

"Gil," said she, indicating Buff with the plate she was wiping, "this is Mr. Warren. Mr. Warren, my sister."

Gil did not move, and her eyes lost none of their hostility.

Buff had risen to his feet. He smiled. The girl did not smile. For a long thirty seconds she stared—stared him up and down as if he were a strange creature of unpleasant habits and ancestry. Then she tossed her head and moved aside, leaving the doorway open.

"Get out!" she ordered.

"Gil!" cried *Jemima*, springing in front of her. "What's the matter with you? Have you gone crazy?"

"No, I haven't gone crazy, but I guess you must have, to let that man in here. Get out of my way!"

So saying, this young lady of action put forth a hand and plucked a rifle from behind the door.

"Now," she added, cocking the hammer, "you going to leave?"

"Don't be a fool!" exclaimed *Buff* sharply. "Haven't you any better sense than to monkey with a gun with kids in the room? Put that gun down, and then I'll go."

But the girl did not put the gun down. She threw it up to her shoulder.

"Go on!" she commanded, her voice hoarse with rage. "Flit!"

It was then that the twins, who had stood dumb and motionless, came to life with a rush. They tore out of the kitchen, yelling for their mother at the top of their lungs.

*Jemima* did not run from the room. She ran in front of *Buff*. Her face was pale under her freckles, and her voice shook as she cried:

"You're not going to shoot him! You're not! Mother, mother, come quick!"

*Buff* thrust his hands under *Jemima's* armpits and gently lifted her to one side.

"No call to get all fussed up," said he. "I was just going, anyway."

He was halfway to the door when *Mrs. Fair* hurried into the kitchen, the wildly excited twins in her wake.

"Put down that gun, Gil!" she ordered.

"I won't!" snapped her daughter, keeping the barrel trained on *Buff* during his progress to the door. "If that man doesn't get out quick, I'll shoot him!"

"Not with that gun," *Mrs. Fair* said dryly. "I unloaded it this morning. Put it back where it belongs. Please wait, Mr. Warren. I want to get at the bottom of this."

*Buff* paused on the threshold. *Gil* grounded the rifle with a thud and slammed it behind the door.

"That's better," commented *Mrs. Fair*. "What makes you act this way, Gil?"

"Mother," replied *Gil*, almost weeping with rage, and pointing a tragic finger at *Buff*, "hasn't that man said anything?"

"Said anything!" repeated *Mrs. Fair*. "He stayed to dinner and talked with us, if that's what you mean."

"You actually fed him?"

"I don't know why I shouldn't!" said her mother sharply. "It seems to me, *Gil*, you've taken leave of your senses. What you need is a good big drink of sassafras tea."

"No, I don't, either, and I don't care if you have given in! I haven't, and I won't! I won't! I'm going to stay right here, if I die for it! They shan't run me off—I tell you that!"

"You needn't stamp your foot at me, young lady," *Mrs. Fair* told her calmly. "I'm glad to hear that you won't give in, even if I have, but I don't know yet what you're talking about."

"Didn't that man tell you to get out of this place?"

*Mrs. Fair* shook her head.

"He's been very polite."

"If he hasn't told you yet, he will. That's what he came for. You know that nice girl that stopped by here yesterday—*Rainbow Fernald*? I met her this morning, and she told me about this man. She described him exactly, and she said he'd been sent by the owner of the *Eighty-Eight* to tell us to leave, and if we wouldn't quit they'd drive us out. Oh, mother, mother, it's always move on, move on, move on, and I thought we'd found a home at last!"

The mother moved swiftly to her daughter's side.

"There, there, deary," she said quietly, slipping an arm around her daughter's waist. "You settle right down. That's right! You had me good and scared for a minute. I tell you, *Gil*, I'm too old for such goings on. Don't you do it again!"

Gone was the wild rage of the girl. She was just a young thing now, glad of her mother's nearness. She dabbed a shirt sleeve across her eyes.

"All the same, you ask him about—what I said."

"I intend to." There was a grim note in *Mrs. Fair's* voice. "Is there anything in what my daughter said, Mr. Warren?"

*Buff* Warren stood and fumbled with his hat. He was in the throes of exactly the emotion suffered by a man about to pay a visit to the dentist. He wished that the earth would open and receive him into its midst, or that he could instantaneously drop dead. He was red to the ears. His skin prickled all over. He scraped his feet till his spur rowels rattled like castanets.

"Well?" said *Mrs. Fair*.



Buff raised his head. Jemima had taken post at her mother's side. Her brown eyes held a hurt look—the look that comes in a friendly dog's eyes when it is shoved away or kicked. The twins were gazing at him, too. Hostility was in their stare.

"It's true," said he bluntly. "I was sent here to tell you people to drag it."

Jemima drew a quick breath.

"Why didn't you tell us, then?"

"I changed my mind."

"Changed your mind?" said Jemima.

He nodded uncomfortably.

"You see, when I rode in here and saw what kind of folks you were, and—and all like that, you understand, I—I—it struck me all of a heap there wasn't any real reason why you didn't have as much right here as the next fellah. I'll have nothing to do with running you off."

"There, now, I knew it!" Jemima exclaimed in ecstatic accents.

"It's a trick!" rebutted Gil with equal promptness.

"You think so?" Buff grinned. The situation was his, and he knew it. "I'll call that bluff. I take it you found the mule you were looking for. You did? Good enough! Where is he? And the other one—he with him? Fine! Jemima, do you know where the team harness is?"

Jemima's eyes were dancing. So were her feet.

"I'll show you. Come on!"

Buff pulled on his hat, and turned to follow. On the doorstep he paused long enough to poke his head round the door jamb and say:

"If you folks will come outdoors in about ten minutes, I'll give you a first-class imitation of a young man and two mules plowing up that going-to-be cornfield!"

## V

"Come, all you jolly plowboys! Come, listen to my lays

And join with me in chorus! I'll sing the plow-boy's praise.

My song is of the plowboy's fame,

And to you I'll relate the same;

He whistles, sings, and drives his team, the brave plowing bo-o-oy!"

THUS sang Rainbow, in a soft and rich contralto. She flung a booted leg around her saddlehorn and leaned forward to watch Buff skate his plow out on the trampled grass at the end of the furrow.

"You did that well," she said critically. "I expect you must have been a hilltop

Reuben at one time. I'm surprised at you—I am indeed; and you with such an innocent face!"

Buff leaned on a plow handle and looked the lady over.

"I don't know you," he said finally. "I never saw you before."

"There are thirty-six verses to that song," threatened the Rainbow.

"In that case, I'm pleased to make your acquaintance," Buff surrendered hastily. "Uh—nice day!"

"Good plowing weather," observed Rainbow.

"Don't rub it in, Rainbow. You know I always was your friend. You be a good girl, now, and ride away on your little pink horse, and next time I see you I'll give you one great, big, round, juicy lollypop."

"You'll give me one great, big, round, juicy split-ear bridle, that's what you'll give me!" cried the outraged Rainbow. "You'll pay your bets, young fellah, and don't you forget it."

Buff delicately cupped a hand at his ear.

"What's that? Bet? Oh, yes, Bet! Pretty name, Bet! I once knew a girl of that name, back East somewhere. Used to call her Betty. She had laughing hair and curly eyes and the most taking ways you ever saw. She was all right to me, though. I never missed anything but my watch. Outside of that—"

Rainbow began to weep noisily, and knuckled her pretty eyes.

"Boohoo! I want my bridle, I do! The hand-carved split-ear, with the silver bit and rein chains, and the silver buckle, and the silver conchas, and seven-foot reins, and—"

"What on earth is the matter?" broke in the voice of Gilian Fair, who had come up unnoticed.

She stood and stared at the other girl in astonishment. Rainbow turned a laughing face toward her, and Buff cut in with—

"It's just her joke, Miss Fair. She's always funning with folks. Don't you mind her. I expect she wasn't licked regular when she was young."

Rainbow grinned. She knew that Buff intended to pay the bet, and she knew that he knew that she knew it; so she dropped an eyelid at him, and said to Miss Fair, with the most innocent air in the world:

"We had a bet on. I won, and now he's trying to get out of paying it. Aren't men the shortest sports?"

"What were you betting about?" dodged Gil.

"A quirt goes with that bridle," thrust in Buff, before Rainbow could make reply.

Rainbow affected to ignore him completely.

"We made a bet that—"

"And a pair of spurs!" Buff cried in desperation.

Rainbow affected to hesitate.

"Silver inlaid?"

Buff gulped at this, and then, as the lady opened her mouth again, he made instant capitulation.

"Silver-inlaid, hand-carved leathers, and glass rosettes."

"Good enough!"

"But what *was* the bet?" demanded the mystified Miss Fair.

"The bet?" repeated Rainbow, and openly gave Buff a reassuring nod. "Oh, he bet his horse could beat mine, and I beat him. Not much of a bet!"

"I'd call it a pretty fair bet," said Gil—"all that silver-inlaid truck."

"I've got to keep going," said Buff, "if I'm going to get an acre under before sundown!"

Rainbow watched him go straddling away on his high-heeled boots, watched him swing the plow upright, watched him start a fresh furrow, and said to Miss Fair, a dancing devil in her black eyes:

"You've hired a good hand there!"

Miss Fair shook her honey-colored head.

"We haven't hired him. We can't afford a man. I wish we could!"

"Then how—"

Miss Fair explained hurriedly, and the half-breed girl listened in silence. When Gilian had said her say, Rainbow nodded absently.

"He's a good-hearted boy," she observed; "but there's only one of him. They'll send somebody else—several somebody elses. You knew I warned you what would happen," she added, as her listener's face clouded.

"I know you did, but—but somehow I keep hoping. We've got a legal right here," said Gil, with a flash of her amber-colored eyes.

"But they don't think so; and they—" Rainbow did not complete the sentence.

"They've got the power," Miss Fair assented wearily. "I suppose they own the sheriff."

"Body, soul, and roll!"

"No help there!"

"Not a bit; but there's Dolan."

"Who's he?"

"County judge—and an odd number.

Nobody can say he owns him, and he jumps whichever way he likes. Always has, and always will. A cold proposition, too. So far he's always been on the side of the cattlemen, because the nesters we've had around here were a rustling bunch of jiggers, and he wasn't wasting any sympathy on them; but you people are different."

"Thank you," Miss Fair remarked dryly.

"I'm not throwing bouquets," said Rainbow, "I'm stating facts. Dolan might help, if he knew the facts."

"I'm not going whining to any judge, and that's flat. If we can't get justice without telling all our private affairs, then we don't want justice. We'll rub along the best we can without it."

"I—er—I didn't mean you," said the Rainbow awkwardly, if anything that the naturally graceful girl said or did could be awkward. "I didn't mean you. I know the judge. Now, listen, honey—don't get mad! I want to help all I can."

Gilian Fair laid her hand on Rainbow's knee and smiled up into her face.

"I've only known you four days, but I feel as if I'd known you all my life. We're friends, and we're going to keep on being friends; but don't you say anything to the judge about us—about how we're fixed, and all. We're not looking for sympathy. Promise, Rainbow?"

Rainbow boarded her last card.

"I was over at the Eighty-Eight to-day. I didn't want to tell you. Mame's my friend, and it seemed like spying, sort of; but I don't care. When I was passing the office door on my way home, I heard Caltrop. He was swearing about what he'd do. I only told you the half of it when I said more of the boys would be sent here to run you off. Caltrop is aiming to burn your buildings, run off your stock, and burn your traps and wagons. He's fixing to set you plumb afoot. 'A shining example to the nesters' is what he says."

Miss Fair's face blanched. Then her chin stiffened.

"I wonder if they think we'll take all that sitting down!"

"What can you do?"

"I can shoot—a little. So can mother." Rainbow shook her head.

"That would be the worst thing you could do. It would make 'em mad for nothing. You wouldn't gain anything by trying to use a gun—not a thing. I talked to Mame. She said she'd speak to her husband, but—"

"I wish you hadn't said a word to her," interrupted Gilian. "We're not beggars, and we certainly don't want sympathy from anybody whose husband is trying to run us off."

"Now, listen, dear," said Rainbow, trying hard to hold down her none too equable temper. "Better let me drop a word in the judge's ear, anyway."

"Promise me you won't say a word to him or to any one else," Miss Fair insisted.

"Oh, all right!" Thus said Rainbow pettishly. "If I'd known you were going to act this way, I'd never have told you a single word. I think you're making a big mistake, Gil. You'll need all the help you can get."

"Help you have to whine for isn't worth much. If it comes to the worst, and they jump us, I'll go to the judge and ask for the protection and redress we're legally entitled to; but I certainly am not going to him now, and I shan't go at all if I can help it."

Rainbow gathered up her reins.

"Gil, you're too damned proud for any human use, and if I stay here any longer you and I'll fight. So long!"

## VI

BUFF WARREN, riding away from the Fair place, pushed a hand into his trouser pocket and withdrew it slowly. He tentatively jingled what lay within his closed fingers, then opened his hand and critically regarded the three pieces of silver that adorned his palm.

"One dollar and six bits," he said aloud. "To a young fellow starting out to buy a paper of pins and a short drink, it looks like a million dollars; but to the same young fellow owing a bill for a hand-carved split-ear and branching out to start a home and fireside, it's a mighty small button on a mighty big shirt!" He sighed, and carefully slid the three pieces of silver back into his pocket. "Boy," he said to the wagging ears of his mount, "take warning! Say your prayers every night, save your money, play your cards close to your belt, and walk in the middle of the road. Never do business with a personal friend unless

you're sure you know more about the business than the personal friend does, and remember that hereafter—

"We sell no trash,  
We sell for cash—  
To trust is very risky;  
And he who trusts  
And never busts  
Puts water in his whisky."

"Bear that in mind, little hoss, and it 'll be money in your pocket!" Buff pushed his hat back, rasped the back of his hand across his forehead, and went on in an entirely different tone: "Speaking of horses, I'd admire to know how I'm to leave the ranch—on foot, or on a borrowed horse!"

For Buff Warren did not own a horse. Besides what he stood up in and the saddle he sat upon, he had title to little of this world's goods. The pressing problem as to means of future transportation occupied him for a time. Then he dismissed it for thoughts far pleasanter, and broke into another snatch of song.

In the dusk of twilight he dismounted at the Eighty-Eight corral. As his right foot touched the ground, he swore under his breath. With extreme tenderness he lowered the left foot from the stirrup to the ground.

"Blistered!" he groaned. "I'll bet they're raw like skun beef. It 'll be a surprise to me if I can get my boots off without using a knife." He took a step and groaned again. "And my legs have stiffened up on me. I'll feel real good to-morrow morning!"

The condition of Buff's feet and legs is not to be wondered at. Totally unaccustomed to walking, his feet incased in tight-fitting, high-heeled cowboy boots, he had that afternoon covered eight or nine miles at the tail of a plow. Buff had sufficient reason to be apprehensive of his probable condition on the morrow.

Carrying his saddle, bridle, and blanket, he wended his limping way toward the bunk house. Here, in the kitchen, Jimmy, the cook, was bawling the heartsome ditty of "The Zebra Dun."

"Dried apple pies!" muttered Buff, cheering up a trifle, for he liked dried apple pies almost as well as he liked those filled with the delectable raisin. Then it occurred to him that he might not be on hand at the consuming of the pies. He was not depressed, however. There were compensations.



Jimmy was a methodical person. When baking pies he always sang "The Zebra Dun." He kneaded dough to the tune of "The Mormon Bishop's Lament," and washed dishes to the inspiring strains of "Dan Taylor."

Buff wondered what kind of a meal Jimmy would set before a late comer. It was long past supper time.

A shadow came upon Buff, and halted.

"My childhood friend and boon companion," said the shadow, "let me tell you a joke."

"Look here, Bill," Buff replied, with suspicion, for he knew the shadow's little ways. "Look here, William, if you're fixing to get frivolous with me, go around the other way. No fooling!"

"No fooling," echoed his cousin. "This is a real joke, and you're it."

"How?" Buff demanded with savage patience, shifting his bridle arm.

Holliday noted the movement, and stepped neatly out of range.

"Easy with the hardware, Buffy! The joke is that you're tripping to the kitchen all set for a meal. That's half of the joke. The other half is that you ain't goin' to get the meal."

"Jimmy on one of his tantrums?"

"My Gawd, yes! Wouldn't even gimme a couple of doughnuts a while ago."

"But he's singing 'The Zebra Dun,' happy as a drunkard."

"That don't mean anything except he's making dried apple pies. Oh, he's on the prod worse'n a cow."

Buff looked speculatively at his cousin, for his brain had suddenly conceived an idea. Bill Holliday owned a good horse. He likewise possessed the sum of fifty dollars in cash.

"What do you want to bet Jimmy don't give me a meal?"

"Huh?"

"I'll bet you Jimmy will gimme porterhouse steak, fried potatoes, coffee, pie, cake, and doughnuts—all I want to eat—when I ask him."

Bill laid an earnest hand upon Buff's arm.

"Buffy, you go see a doctor quick. Your brain is mushin' up."

"You're afraid to bet me—that's what's the matter with you!"

"No, I ain't."

"Put up or shut up!"

"There's a string to this," dodged Bill.

"You'll lam Jimmy over the head or something, and get your own supper."

"No, I won't, either. Jimmy will give me porterhouse steak, round frieds, coffee, pie, cake, and doughnuts when I ask him. Of course, I may have to ask him more than once."

"I guess you will sort of have to—with a club."

"Clubs are barred. I'll use my tongue only."

"You won't try to wrastle it out of him?" Bill asked doubtfully. "And you'll make him give you all the truck you said?"

"No wrastling, and he'll give me what I said of his own free will."

"If he don't give you all that truck—all of it, mind—I win?"

"You'll win, but we haven't made the bet yet."

"Ten dollars even."

"Chicken feed! Make it a worth-while bet. Lessee, now—I got it. My saddle against your horse, Buster."

"Aw, Buster's a good horse!"

"It's a good saddle—worth forty as is."

"Buster's worth sixty, any day. He's only going on five. He's fast, strong, and the best cutting pony on the range."

"That's why I want him. What you growling about? If Jimmy's on the prod like you say he is, you ought to give me odds; but I'll sweeten it some. Add thirty-five dollars cash money to the horse, and I'll put my ivory-handled six-shooter on the blanket. You know you've been wanting that six-shooter a long time."

"I haven't been wanting it thirty-five dollars' worth. Make it thirty!"

"It's a bet," said Buff swiftly.

"Horse and thirty dollars against your saddle and six-shooter. You to use your tongue only. Time limit, half an hour."

"Nothing was said about a time limit," exclaimed the properly indignant Buff.

"The bet's off."

"Make it forty-five minutes, then. Gimme a chance for my money."

"Mine, you mean. Forty-five goes. I'll just go along with you and stick outside on the wash bench and listen to you work James."

"I wish you would. I want you to listen. Maybe you'll learn something. Come on!"

Buff dropped his saddle and bridle at the kitchen door, and entered. Jimmy paused in his labors long enough to give him a frown of supreme disapproval.

"What do you think this is—a restaurant?" he yapped. "I thought, when I quit the Bar S and come over here, I'd be shut of you fellers; but no, you and that Bill Holliday got to quit too and follow me here inside a month, just to plague me!"

"You're exaggeratin', James," declared Buff, with amazing meekness. "We had a run-in with Old Salt, same as you did. We naturally had to quit. And where, I ask you, would you expect us to find another job? Why, at the Eighty-Eight, where our old friend James is dishing out his well-known fare."

"I ain't your old friend," growled Jimmy; "and if your majesty thinks he can come traipsing in at midnight and get anything to eat, he's got another guess comin'. I'm a good-natured man, I am, but I got enough to do fillin' the hay-bellies of ten good-for-nothin' punchers three times a day—"

"That makes two hundred and ten hay-bellies a week," cut in Buff, sliding into the nearest chair.

"Without scratching up short orders at odd times," Jimmy went on. "You can stick a pin in that, Buff Warren!"

"How you do run on!" murmured Buff.

"I want my supper, James."

"There's no law against wantin'."

"I want my supper."

"Take a lap in your waistband."

"I want my supper."

"Can't you say nothin' else? You remind me of a cuckoo clock my old aunt had once. She was always repeatin' herself thataway. When she was wound up good, she'd say 'Cuckoo' three hundred times without stopping."

"Weren't you scared?"

"Scared? Why should I be scared?"

"Well, if I had an aunt that said 'Cuckoo' three hundred times without stopping, I'd be scared. Sometimes folks like that get real violent. Tell me some more about that aunt. Did she have any other symptoms?"

"Look here, Buff Warren!" began Jimmy dangerously. "If you're going to insult my relations—"

"Insult your relations!" cried Buff. "Me? Why, James, old firecracker, I like your relations. I admire 'em. I even like and admire you. What could be fairer than that?"

Buff hooked his thumbs in the armholes of his vest and beamed upon Jimmy.

"All the same," grunted Jimmy, picking up the rolling pin, "you don't get a thing to eat."

"Would you turn a starving man from your door?"

"I'd turn a long, lazy lump of slumgullion from my door—that's what I'd do!"

"All right for you!" Buff remarked, removing his thumbs from the armholes of his vest, and steeping his fingers with ministerial dignity. "All right for you! I was in Farewell last Monday. I ate at Laine's, but I ain't saying who asked after you."

Jimmy looked uncertainly at Buff. He thrust out his tongue and lower lip, retired from view one end of his mustache and chewed it thoughtfully. The movements of the rolling pin became slower and slower. Finally they ceased altogether.

Jimmy stood up and rubbed the small of his back with a floury hand. That part of his mustache which had vanished now made its reappearance. Jimmy smiled.

"In Farewell last Monday, huh?" said he in dulcet tones. "And at the hotel! Did—"

"Not a word, James," Buff said. "I ain't sayin' a word. You've treated me mean. My heart's broke."

"Aw, quit your foolin', Buffy! Listen here—did you see—"

"I'm so hungry I don't remember," wailed Buffy, rubbing the outside of his aching void.

"I'll bet you didn't go to the hotel at all!"

"I'm satisfied if you are. Windy Taylor, he was eating there, too."

Windy Taylor was Jimmy's hated rival.

"What did he have to say to her?" he demanded.

Buff cast his eyes ceilingward.

"He said—he said—lemme see, now, what was it he said? Something about—about—well, I declare, James, if I ain't forgot!"

"Forgot!" yapped Jimmy. "You can't have forgot! Think, man, think!"

"If I could wrap myself around a bit of porterhouse steak and round frieds and coffee, and maybe a piece of pie, cake, and some doughnuts to top off with, maybe I could remember."

Jimmy hesitated. Buff watched him through half closed eyes whose lids masked keenest interest.

"Well," said Jimmy slowly, "it's just

dumb luck I've got a porterhouse. I was saving it for myself, but—"

He made an eloquent gesture, and reached for a frying pan.

Within twenty minutes Buff was hitching up his chair to the kitchen table.

"Well, well!" said he, in loud, cheerful tones calculated to reach the ear of a listener lurking on the wash bench. "As I live and breathe, porterhouse steak, round fried, and coffee! Is that cake? It is cake, good cake, and this is the doughnut family. Welcome, little strangers! And a piece of pie. Don't apologize, James. I know the apple pies won't be ready till tomorrow. This peach pie will do fine. The whole layout's worth thirty dollars of any man's money. Thirty wheels—count 'em—thirty. Let's go!"

Entered then Mr. Bill Holliday, who thrust into Buff's willing hand three yellow disks that chinked pleasantly as they were transferred.

"What I owe you," said Bill briefly. "You'll find the horse in the night trap."

"That's what I call right clever of you, William," acknowledged Buff. "Won't you join me? No? In that case I'll see you later—"

So saying, Buff Warren picked up knife and fork and squared his shoulders to the task before him.

"And if I were you, Jimmy," said Buff in conclusion, "I wouldn't lose any sleep over that hasher and Windy Taylor. Didn't I tell you what she said about you? Well, then!"

"I guess you're right," Jimmy pronounced beatifically. "Have another piece of pie?"

Buff patted his stomach and shook a regretful head.

"Not a speck of room. Sorry! But if you could gimme some of that pet salve of yours for a blis—for a small cut I've got on my leg, I'd be real grateful."

## VII

"WHAT you limping for?" demanded Sam Caltrop, when Buff entered the office next morning.

"Sprained my ankle," was the laconic reply.

"Blistered your heels, you mean," chuckled Caltrop. "You've been walking. What's the matter—horse throw you or something?"

Buff's blue eyes narrowed slightly.

"Horses don't throw me and folks don't ride me—much."

"Huh? Oh, hell, Buff, tuck in your claws! Did you haze those nesters off like I told you?"

"Who—me?"

"Yes, you. Who else? Did you?"

"As a matter of fact, I didn't."

"You didn't! You didn't! Why didn't you?"

"I didn't feel like it, because that nester is blind."

"You've got more nerve than a sore tooth to come in here independent as a hawg on ice and try to give me any such excuse as that! I can't help whether he's blind or not. What really happened? Nesters run you off?"

Buff's upper lip lifted in a toothy smile, but his eyes were sufficiently frosty.

"Speakin' plain and man to man, just so you won't get any wrong ideas in your noddle, I'd like to mention once more that I didn't feel like it, because he's blind. I don't like to repeat myself. If folks would keep their ears open, it wouldn't be necessary to say a thing twice."

Sam Caltrop sat back in his chair and positively goggled at his employee. What on earth was biting the invariably even-tempered Warren? Couldn't he take a joke? Or what was the matter?

"Look here, Buff!" said Caltrop. "This riddle's too much for me. I'll bite. Give it a name."

"No riddle about it. I quit yesterday morning. You might as well give me my time."

Here was something Caltrop could understand. He turned at once to his desk, and routed out pencil and paper.

"Yesterday morning," he repeated, looking at Buff. "Why not this morning?"

"Because I was plowing for that nester most of yesterday."

Caltrop blinked, swallowed, and blinked again.

"What's that? Say it again!"

"You heard me the first time."

"If I heard you correctly you'll walk off this ranch!" Caltrop announced, with venom. "No man plowing"—he fairly spat the word—"for a nester can borrow any horse of mine!"

"I wouldn't think of borrowing from you. I wouldn't think of walking off the ranch, either. I'd rather ride."



"Not on one of my horses!"

"One of mine."

"You ain't got one."

"Your mistake. That yellah Buster horse, he's mine."

"That's so—Bill Holliday owns Buster, doesn't he? Well, if he lends you Buster, he's fired!"

"Shucks, you don't want to do that! Bill's a top hand. Besides, I won Buster off him last night; so I won't have to do any walking. Hurts your feet, walking does. About my time, now—if you'd fix it up, I'd be real obliged."

Caltrop started to speak, but thought better of it, and returned to his figuring.

"Two months and ten days," he said, after a moment. "That's ninety-three thirty-three. You've had five advances—four of twenty apiece, and one of three dollars, making eighty-three in all. I make it ten thirty-three coming to you. Call it ten thirty flat."

"Good enough!" assented Buff. "I'll take the cash, if you've got it handy. Those barkeeps always discount a check."

Caltrop counted out the requisite amount and handed it to Buff.

"Let me tell you," said the manager, while Buff was stuffing his wealth into his pocket, "this is the worst day's work you ever did in your life, Buff. Plowing, and you a puncher! I don't understand it. By Gawd, I don't! I think you must be crazy."

He closed on a sorrowful note, and wagged his head at Buff.

"Oh, I'm crazy," Buff admitted cheerfully; "crazy like a fox."

"Then go on and be crazy outside somewheres," Caltrop snapped, provoked. "I'm busy. I just expect I'll have to ride over to McFluke's and clear those nesters out myself!"

"Don't let me discourage you," said Buff kindly; "but I've sort of set my heart on having those nesters let alone."

Caltrop went off with a bang.

"I don't give a damn what you've set your heart on. Those nesters must go, and they're goin'!"

"Suit yourself," Buff told him with phlegm. "Only be sure your chaw ain't too big for your jaw."

"Are you threatening me?"

"I never point a gun at a man unless I'm willing to shoot him. I thank you for your kind attention. So long!"

Whereupon Buff nodded lightly to his late employer and departed to catch up the Buster horse.

"Why, blank-blank-blanket!" cried Caltrop, in conclusion. "I tell you, Rum, Buff's gone crazy!"

"Doesn't sound like he's crazy," said Rum Gordon.

"You mean to tell me a puncher—a rider—would admit he'd been *plowing*, if he was in his right mind? The man's crazy as a June bug. He must be. That's why I didn't argue with him much. I knew it was no use."

"There must be something back of it all," suggested the foreman.

"You think so, do you? You're coming on, Rum. Didn't I just tell you what was the matter with him?"

"I know you did; but I saw Buff, and said so long before he left. Of course, I didn't know then why he was quitting, but I know he was as sensible as you or I. No, he ain't crazy. He—"

"Don't you know better by this time than to argue with Sam?" cut in Mame Caltrop, entering unexpectedly from the kitchen. "My Samuel is always right!" She ruffled her brother's hair as she passed to perch on the arm of her husband's chair. "What seems to be the trouble? Who's crazy, and why?"

Caltrop informed her in detail. Mame listened and laughed.

"So you think he's crazy, do you?" said she. "Nothing like it! One of those nesters is a girl, and he's fallen in love with her."

"How do you know?" demanded her brother. "No girls in the outfit, so far as I heard. Who told you there was?"

"Rainbow. I thought I told you. Anyway, Buff's in love. Can't you see it? It's as plain as the nose on your face."

"Rats!" Caltrop cried in scorn. "You're a woman! What do you know? Rum, get your horse, and we'll run those nesters off ourselves!"

"Wait," urged Mame. "Go a little easy, Sam. Do you know the father of that nester outfit is blind?"

"Sure I know! What difference does that make?"

"You didn't tell me he was blind," said Rum. "Not that it makes any difference," he added quickly, with a glance at his brother-in-law.

"I came to tell you in the office not five minutes after Rainbow left, but both you and Sam had just gone off somewhere. You didn't get in till all hours, when I was asleep, and I never thought of it again till this minute. Anyway, I'm telling you now. Don't be too hard on those people."

Caltrop shook his stubborn head.

"I don't want 'em, and I ain't going to have 'em. Ready, Rum?"

"If you'll take my advice," Mame broke in, appealing to his head, when she saw that she had failed to touch his heart, "you'll wait till some of the boys come in, and take 'em along."

"Don't you guess Rum and I can curry a short horse like this by our lonesome?" inquired Caltrop.

"Sometimes these short horses have more legs than a centipede," rejoined Mame, "with a kick in every leg. You seem to forget that a man in love is likely to be mighty independent of consequences. Oh, all right, all right—have it your own way; only don't say I never warned you. My Lord, Sam!" Her voice rose shrilly. "You must think Buff Warren's a fool!"

"Didn't I tell you he was crazy? Come on, Rum!"

### VIII

"BUSTER," opened up Buff, when the ranch was a mile over his horse's tail, "if you were as hopping mad as Caltrop, what would you do about those nesters? Would you sit still and fiddle your fingers till you could get the boys together, or would you sally right out and swing the job yourself?"

Buster, naturally, said nothing, so his master made reply.

"Knowing Caltrop for a hell-rushing party warranted to go off half cocked any time anywhere, it's my sneaking notion he'll take Rum Gordon and organize to turn the trick at once, if not sooner. Which being the case, it wouldn't be a bad idea for me to sort of watch the progress of events from the top of the next hill."

Anchoring Buster slightly below the crest of the reverse slope of the next hill, Buff lay down behind a wild currant bush and proceeded to put his idea into practice.

"Don't anybody pull his gun!" advised Buff.

Caltrop and Rum Gordon sat their horses in innocuous desuetude below a young growth of sumac fringing the top of

a cut bank. Buff, observing that his prey was taking a course different from that calculated upon, had changed his place of ambush.

"You can't see me," went on Buff in his most genial tone; "but I can see you quite plain," he added thoughtfully.

Caltrop and his brother-in-law remained silent—the latter because it was his habit not to use words unnecessarily, the former because he was so stricken with surprise that his tongue failed him. Caltrop gulped and tugged at his collar.

"Look here, Buff, what do you think you're doing?" he demanded, when he could speak.

"Holding you up and making it stick," was the cheerful reply.

"Don't you know—" began Caltrop.

"I know that you're making a big mistake," interrupted Buff, "if you think you're going to run off those nesters to-day. You seem to have forgotten what I told you back there at the ranch."

Caltrop made no attempt to deny his destination.

"You can go plumb to hell!" he said, and started his horse.

Bang! The dry, whiplike crack of Buff's Winchester smacked the windless air. A bullet kicked up the dust under the nose of Caltrop's horse. The manager, losing the last vestige of his common sense, went after his gun. Rum Gordon, crowding in his horse, seized his brother-in-law's wrist, and held it fast.

"Don't be a fool!" he advised in a low voice. Then, in louder tones: "Don't shoot, Buff! No reason why this thing should end in the smoke!"

"Lemme go!" cried Caltrop, vainly jerking to free his wrist. "Do you think I'm going to let—"

"Do you think I'm going to let you get shot?" rejoined Rum. "Buff is holding every card in the pack. Have some sense! Let me try my hand at this."

The glare in Caltrop's eyes subsided.

"You stay here talking to him, and I'll slide around in back and get him," was his whispered counsel.

"Wait till I talk to him," insisted Rum. The foreman had always liked Buff, and, in spite of the latter's peculiar stand on the subject of nesters, he was not prepared to see him killed. "Wait now. I'll fix this up."

"All right," surrendered Caltrop.

Rum released the wrist he held, and turned toward Buff.

"You don't realize what you're doing, Buff. You can't buck the whole county."

"Who's going to stop me?" demanded the unseen Buff.

"We'll have to."

"I dare you to!" Thus the truculent cowboy, with a chuckle that set fresh fire to the tow of Caltrop's smoking temper.

"We'll take that dare!" shouted the ranch manager. "Tell me I've bitten off more'n I can chew! You'd better take a file to your own teeth. They'll need it before we're through with you!"

"Where," inquired Buff, "is your well known sense of humor?"

"Keep quiet, Sam!" enjoined Rum. Then, to Buff: "You ought to know what nesters mean on the range, Buff. If we let one come in, they'll all come. We can't have that."

"Sure, you can't," concurred Buff, anxious to do all he could to preserve friendly relations with his friend Rum. "Keep the rest out. This one family is all I want let alone."

Rum shook his head.

"Not even this one, Buff. We've got to make an example."

"Damn the example! Be reasonable! One family won't hurt the range, and you know it. All they want to do is to farm it. What's ten, or twenty, or even forty acres alongside of the hundreds of thousands there are on this range?"

"Nothing at all, looking at it that way," was the prompt reply; "but when you multiply those tens, twenties, and forties by hundreds, they mount up. Soon they put a crimp in the range. Then where is the cattle business?"

"Can't help it," persisted the stubborn Buff, his single-mindedness of purpose not shaken in the least. "Between—here, where you going? You stay right there with Rum, Sam!"

Caltrop checked his half turned horse.

"You're almighty suspicious, seems to me," he snarled. "How long do you expect us to sit here gassing with you?"

"Not another minute. You're going now, and you're going together. I ain't figuring to let Rum hold me here a talking while you ride around and plug me in the back—no, not to-day, old-timer. So long!"

"Say, look here! You can't—"

"I said 'So long,'" Buff cut him short.

"And take my advice with you—leave the Fair family alone."

"The Gair family—is that right?" Caltrop inquired, evincing a lack of attention to detail that was at variance with his nature, as Buff knew it. "The Gairs—I'll try to remember."

"Fair is the name," Buff patiently corrected him. "F, A, I, R. Just bear it in mind, that's a good fellah. Once more, so long, good-by, farewell to thee! I don't want to set you afoot," he added pointedly.

Caltrop and his companion took the hint. When they were gone, Buff, after a careful reconnaissance had convinced him that they had no intention of turning back, returned to his horse. He tightened the cinch with a sober face.

He realized that he had taken an irrevocable step. Quite definitely he had placed himself beyond the pale, outside the ranks of the cowmen. Henceforth he would not ride with riders. The companionship of camp and trail, the warm and friendly atmosphere of the bunk house, were no longer intimate parts of his existence. His friends? Who in that country but nesters would be friends of such a man as himself?

Everything that went to make life the hitherto joyous thing he had found it, he had exchanged—for what? The one woman, or the pot of gold at the rainbow's end? He did not know.

"And that's that," he said aloud, and swung into the saddle.

Rainbow, brave with a new pair of silver inlaid spurs, her carved spur leathers embellished with glass rosettes an inch and a half in diameter, her horse, Windigo, looking through a split-ear bridle of carved leather with silver conchas, a silver buckle, rein chains of Mexican silver and a Kelly bit inlaid with silver, waved a morning greeting to Buff.

"Howdy?" said Buff. "Where's the quirt?"

"Quirt? What—oh, that! Shucks, Buff, I wouldn't rub it in that way. A bet's a bet. The bridle I told Joy to charge to you. The spurs I bought myself. I'm perfectly willing to make you 'most any old kind of bet you like, any time!"

"Not to-day," Buff declared hastily.

Rainbow laughed.

"It was a sure thing, wasn't it? How come you're riding Buster? I thought Bill kept him in cotton wool."



"He's mine now, Buster is. I ain't workin' for the Eighty-Eight any more."

Rainbow accepted this without comment.

"I'm going to the Eighty-Eight now. Didn't I see two Eighty-Eight gentlemen in this vicinity a while ago—under that cut bank yonder?"

"You may have," assented Buff.

"Looked like they turned around and went back the way they came."

"They may have changed their minds."

Rainbow nodded.

"Caltrop and Rum Gordon are given to that. Did you have to argue with them much?"

"Not much."

"Caltrop very unreasonable?"

"He acted up some."

"I guess Mame couldn't swing him, after all. She told me she didn't think she'd be able to when I talked to her yesterday. He's plumb set in his ways whenever nesters are concerned, and the more you oppose him the worse he is."

"Don't I know that well enough?" admitted Buff ruefully.

"I expect he's just about raving savage now?" hazarded Rainbow.

"Just about."

"Then it's no use my going over to the Eighty-Eight to-day. He'll be jumping sidewise all over the place. Where you bound—the Fairs? Then I'll ride with you."

## IX

"SHUCKS, you oughtn't to have done that!" said Buff deprecatingly, eying the completely plowed field. "I was figuring to do it myself, only I was detained."

"Don't apologize," said Gilian, unhooking the doubletree from the plow. "I'm pretty well used to plowing, and there's really no reason why you should do all our work for us."

"I—er—I like farm work," declared Buff, and at the moment he really believed he did. "You going to harrow now?"

She nodded.

"That comes next, but—"

"Let me do it." Buff slipped from his horse, dropped the reins, and gently but firmly took the plow lines from Gilian's fingers. "You'd better go to the house and see Rainbow. She stopped to talk to your mother. I'll just hook on to the harrow and have the job done before you can wink."

Without further ado Gilian departed. She did not look back. If she had, she would not have realized what it was costing Buff not to limp. Each of his feet felt as if it were on fire.

"A pair of shoes for me, soon as I strike town!" said he, as he choused the mules down the field.

For three days Buff Warren hung about the Fair place. When the harrowing was finished, the mold was still too wet from a recent rain to put in the seed. Buff hung about doing odd jobs. He thought it as well to stay on a few days, in case Caltrop should persist in his attempt to drive out the Fairs; but apparently the rancher had experienced a change of heart. At least, he committed no overt act during those three days.

The fourth day dawned hot. It promised to be a roaster, and it kept its word.

Buff, whose feet were feeling considerably better, thanks to many applications of salve, decided to plow another couple of acres. He wished to preserve at least an appearance of industry in the sight of his lady.

He had not been working more than an hour when Gilian came out, bearing a jug. She waited for him under a cottonwood at the field's end. He halted his team in the shade, and she proffered the jug, beaded with drops of moisture.

"Buttermilk," said she. "I thought maybe you'd like some."

He drank gratefully. Buttermilk! He closed his eyes and was home again. The lilacs were in bloom, and his mother, in one of the blue and white print dresses she always wore, was moving among them. Far away a cowbell tinkled; but it was only the ringing of his spurs.

He put down the jug and wiped his mouth. Gilian regarded him curiously. She had flopped down cross-legged, and sat hugging her knees.

"Why have you adopted us?" she asked him point-blank.

Buff reddened, and hated himself for reddening.

"Have I adopted you?" he asked in his turn.

She waved her hand at the field.

"Looks like it. What about your regular work?"

"I haven't any regular work."

"I thought you rode for the Eighty-Eight."

"Quit."

"Because of us?" she probed, running a finger around the inside of her handkerchiefless open collar.

"I was about ready to quit. Us fellahs come and go. Never stay long in any one place."

"You didn't answer my question," she prodded, sticking to her point. "I'll bet you and the Eighty-Eight folks had words!"

"Nothing like that."

"You can't fib to me," she told him calmly. "I can tell by just looking at you whether you're telling the truth or not. You quit the Eighty-Eight on account of us, because they didn't like it when you wouldn't run us off. You oughtn't to have helped us. It's bound to hurt you. We nesters are bad luck to cowmen."

"Not to me," he said.

"Can you get another job?"

"Easy!" This with all the confidence in the world.

"Suppose the other ranchers heard about your helping us?" she asked shrewdly.

"Suppose they do!"

"Where's your job then?"

"What difference will that make?"

"You can't make me believe it won't make all the difference in the world. If you've got any sense, you'll get on that horse of yours and give us the go-by."

"What would you think of me if I did?"

The amber eyes dropped.

"I'd think you were doing just right."

"You know better! You'd think I was mighty low down—that's what you'd think. Your folks don't mind my hanging around, do they?"

"They don't, but—"

There was a troubled look in the amber eyes.

"Then, if they don't, there can't be any buts. *You* don't mind, do you?"

"If you'll take my advice," she told him steadily, "you'll go away and never come back here."

"Do you want me to go away?" Buff demanded.

"Yes," she said abruptly, without looking at him.

"Look at me!" he commanded gently.

"Look at me and say that!"

She looked at him critically.

"Don't be so tragic. I'm telling you to go for your own good."

"Tell me why."

She shook her charming head.

"I can't tell you."

"Won't, you mean?"

"Take it that way, if you like," she said with studied indifference.

Baffled, not a little upset, he stared at the girl. Before he could reorganize his forces for a counterattack, the Bob twin, wet to the waist, came pelting up the slope from the fringe of trees along the river and flung himself panting upon Buff, who only saved the jug of buttermilk from destruction by the briskest sort of action.

The twin's face, red with exertion, was working convulsively. At first he could not speak, but puffed and panted and crowed gaspingly.

"Here!" said the capable Gilian, seizing her brother by the shoulders and expertly tripping him into a sitting position. "Get your breath, and then talk."

Within thirty seconds the twin began a wheezing flow of language, absolutely incoherent, so far as Buff was concerned; but Gilian understood. Buff could see her cool expression alter to one of angry indignation as she listened.

She turned swiftly to Buff.

"He says that some man is driving away our bunch of cattle. He's heading up the river on the other side—a mile away, Bob says, but he isn't very good at distance, and it may be more. What—"

"Don't you fret," Buff advised kindly, his hands rapidly unharnessing the off mule. "I'll attend to this thing. There's no use telling anybody at the house about this. You and Bob better stay here till I come back."

"I expect so," said Gilian, her hands clasped together. "T-take c-c-care of yourself. Don't let him hurt you!"

"You bet I won't," promised Buff.

He flung himself astride the stripped mule and galloped off across the plowland toward the shed, in front of which his still saddled horse stood nibbling at the grass.

Pushing his horse, Buff marked the rustler's course from a hilltop, and rode in a semicircle to cut him off. In this maneuver he was so successful that when the rustler was within two hundred yards of the cottonwoods along Packsaddle Creek, Buff rode out from among the trees.

He recognized the man—Andy Tresawna, of Farewell, a gentleman who played cards not only wisely but too well. It was

commonly reported of him that he could, when necessity called, make extra aces and kings sprout from practically any part of his clothing. Unofficial sources rated him a mine salter, and it was well known that he traded in horses; but cattle were a new interest of his, so far as Buff knew.

"Lo, Andy!" Buff greeted him, and pulled up. "How's tricks?"

"Good enough," returned Tresawna.

His little green eyes, slightly close-set, were wary as a coyote's. He reined over his horse to ride past.

"Got a match?" asked Buff quickly.

Tresawna checked his horse at once, and reached up to his hat band for a match.

"Fat, strong-looking cattle!" was Buff's critical comment, as he took the match.

"Yeah," assented Tresawna, pushing back his hat and scratching his low-growing thatch of pale yellow hair. He wrinkled his predatory nose, took snuff, and sneezed. "Rappee?" said he, as if in an afterthought, and offered the mull to Buff.

"No, thanks," declined Buff, alert to catch the slightest hostile move on the part of the slippery Tresawna. "Mavericks, I see. Don't look like the stuff around here. Where you catch 'em?"

"Over yonder," Tresawna replied vaguely, flashing an oblique glance at the cattle grazing twenty yards away.

Buff Warren was asking more questions than were customary, but he asked them to the accompaniment of such a pleasant smile that Tresawna felt constrained to proceed softly.

"I didn't know you had any cattle, Andy. What's your mark?" Buff pressed on, in a tone most carefully casual.

Although the tone was casual, the import of the question was not, it being a known fact that only cattle are earmarked. Andy, dealing solely in horses, would not have an earmark; but the gambler was not stumped.

"My mark?" said he. "Staple fork in the left."

"How long have you been dealing in cows?" demanded Buff.

"Oh, some time, some time. You know where I can pick up a few more like these here? I wouldn't object to some more yearlings, either."

"I'll bet you wouldn't! This one yonder must have been somebody's milk cow, Andy. There's a blab on the calf, too."

"She's a range cow, Buff."

"Got another match? My pill is out."

Tresawna again reached upward to his hat band. The hand froze, and he stared at Buff in shocked surprise, for the latter's gun was trained on his belt buckle.

"Have you gone into the road agent business?" cried Tresawna.

"Aren't you pleased?" grinned Buff. "Competition is the life of trade. I'd feel better, Andrew, if you'd keep your right hand where it is. Now the left. That's it. Hold it! I'll just get your gun. Are you packing a hideout?"

"You got the only gun I've got—had, I mean," grumbled Tresawna.

"Which may or may not be true. You know how careless you are in little things like that; but for the sake of argument we'll take it I've got your one and only weapon. You'll notice mine is still pointing at the pit of your stomach, so don't let's have any vulgar publicity."

Tresawna suddenly smiled.

"I know!" he said brightly. "You want the cattle yourself!"

Buff shook his head.

"Wrong! The Fairs want them."

"I see!" Tresawna averred in a knowing tone. "They have a girl, haven't they?"

"We weren't talking about her," Buff said sharply.

"So we weren't," smiled Tresawna. "It was the cattle we were discussing. You'd like to take 'em back there with you—is that it?"

"You make my meaning plainer than I could myself."

"Hop to it, then, and don't linger on my account."

"We won't either of us linger. I want to see you well on your way before I do anything else."

"But the cattle might stray. I don't want to put you to any trouble, Buff."

"I thank you kindly, but it ain't any trouble. It's a pleasure. Let's go!"

Buff, as he rode behind Tresawna's horse, was not in the least deceived by the gambler's almost placid acceptance of the situation. Tresawna would undoubtedly try to kill him at the first good opportunity; and a good opportunity, in Tresawna's estimation, would be when Buff wasn't looking. If pushed, the man would fight fairly, but his preference was always for the furtive and devious.

*(To be continued in the March number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)*

# The Other Cheek

A STORY OF THE PUGILATUS, OR PRIZE RING, OF IMPERIAL ROME

By John D. Swain

**D**OWN in the Suburra, some patrician ladies of Rome were giving a petting party at the Cestus Tavern, a resort of gladiators.

Wives and daughters of obese senators, of opulent contractors and taxgatherers, or of generals whose legions were crouched on some far frontier, having exhausted all the devices of luxury, turned to the Suburra. It was like the old Bowery of New York, the Barbary Coast of San Francisco, the London Whitechapel, the Paris Montmartre, rolled into one and cast in the harsh and primitive mold of the first century of the Christian era, or the ninth of the imperial city of Rome.

Skyscraping tenement houses, three or even four stories in height, and packed with idle women and dirty children; pawnshops; booths where cheap wine and boiled snails were sold; taverns patronized by gladiators, acrobats, soldiers, slaves, and seamen from every port of the Mediterranean—such was the Suburra. By day it was the haunt of race touts with tips on the charioteers, gymnasium hangers-on, masseurs, and animal trainers. At night there came into its oozy, ill lighted streets closed litters borne by powerful Nubians and attended by torchbearers and one or two armed slaves. From them descended veiled figures, any one of whom, as all Rome knew, might be the empress herself.

The ladies in the Cestus Tavern, redolent of strange perfumes which wild men had sweated across a thousand miles of stinking jungle and parched desert to fetch to the nearest trading port, sat upon hard, backless stools about a low, round, one-legged table. On the table were a great amphora of harsh red wine, a cheese of such powerful odor that it acted upon their jaded nostrils as a narcotic, hard-baked

bread, and blood-red sausages oozing fat and garlic.

Their lips—which had more than once tasted single dishes whose contents had cost the price of a walled town—derived a certain perverse satisfaction from this coarse fare. Their nerves, reacting to the sounds and smells of the low inn, stirred in new thrills, which swept their sumptuous persons, steamed, pummiced, and perfumed in the baths which were at one and the same time libraries, theaters, gymnasiums, and clubs.

Their eyes half closed. Gentle sighs caused the jewels upon their breasts to rise and fall, and to twinkle in the light of the torches set against the walls. Their hands, soft and rosy, with henna-stained nails, crept out and strayed lingeringly over the brass-hard shoulder and arm muscles that the three gladiators proudly flexed.

Apart in a far corner of the low-ceiled room, two men sat watching the party with ill concealed scorn.

These two offered a striking contrast, while yet possessing certain basic qualities in common. The elder, whose close-cropped gray hair, strong but yellow teeth, clear eyes, and healthy skin left the tally of his years a matter of some doubt, bore on his face innumerable scars of conflict. His left ear would in our idiom be termed a cauliflower. His nose had been broken at least once; and as he was Latin by birth, it might now be termed a double Roman in design. Two of his front teeth were missing, and there were several ancient gashes on his cheek and jaw.

He wore a loose tunic. As he leaned upon the table, the tremendous development of his huge and hairy forearms balanced his mighty chest, which was nearly as deep as wide. Such was Lutorius, a



Roman citizen, the undefeated, though not unscathed, champion of the *pugilatus*. He had practically retired from active competition. He was now a *lanista*, or trainer, and was commonly reputed to be wealthy, for a gladiator.

His companion looked slender beside him, until one noted that the perfection of Greek symmetry masked the thews which, guided by a rare intelligence, had made him a champion of Greece at twenty-four. He was a freedman, only recently arrived in Rome, where he had entered the stable of a young patrician sporting man.

He had been matched against Lutorius, the bout being intended as a try-out, that Rome might get a line on the pride of Corinth. Barring accidents, nothing worse than a broken jaw could result from the exhibition.

The two were watching the petting party across the room, the elder with a manly scorn, the younger with an almost ascetic intolerance. They talked in Greek, because the newcomer spoke no other tongue, while Lutorius, in common with most Roman citizens, could manage a little Greek, which was the language of the court.

"Yonder folly points the downfall of Rome. In my youth, it was far different," said the old gladiator, voicing the eternal plaint of age. "To-day, we have women and dwarfs competing in the circus before the eyes of the rabble—aye, and knights, perfumed and powdered, contending against gladiators bribed to let them win!"

Onomastos, the young Corinthian, nodded abstractedly.

"So it comes about that our matrons no longer rear families of sturdy boys," Lutorius went on. "As our sons are devoured by the legions, their places are taken by a hotchpotch of immigrants. We are become the melting pot of nations. One jostles Goths, Gauls, Spaniards, Moors, Arabs, Egyptians, Syrians, Persians, Lydians, Thracians, Scythians, Cilicians, and the gods know what not. If you would seek a real Roman, you must visit the tombs of the Via Appia, or the trenches of distant battlefields. Soon Rome will cease to be the empress of the world, and will become its kept woman!"

The noble matrons at this moment rose languidly, each unclasping a jeweled bracelet and dropping it carelessly upon the table as she departed with undulating hips. Their companions of an hour rose, bowing

humbly until the ladies had passed from the inn. Afterward, they made sneering comments that might, if overheard by their objects, have led to a number of crucifixions on the morrow.

Lutorius dismissed the matter from his mind.

"Onomastos, lad, I have a kindness for thee because of thy great father Epeus, he who was named after the founder of boxing a thousand years ago. He and I contended thrice. Our first two bouts were adjudged draws." He closed his eyes, and added reminiscently: "He was the first man ever broke my nose."

Onomastos sighed.

"My father was a heathen," he said.

The old man scowled at him.

"What? Wouldst utter impieties against thy own sire?"

"Not so, Lutorius. I loved him in life as I honor him in death; but he never knew the true faith. Daily I pray that when his soul comes before the judgment seat, God may forgive him his ignorance, and grant him everlasting life."

Lutorius grunted.

"Concern thyself not with his soul," he reproved the younger man. "We appeased it by three days of gladiatorial combat, together with much feasting, hard by his grave. No less than ten brave contenders died there, and their shades accompanied his across the dark Styx. I myself gladly yielded up two teeth against Amycus, one of those whose soul companioned his."

"Lutorius, you do not understand me. Such deeds will count rather against than for my honored father; for the law of the Carpenter of Galilee is one of peace, rather than strife, and of forgiveness to those who offend us. If smitten upon one cheek, we are bidden to turn the other."

The eyes of the old boxer grew round with surprise.

"By Castor! I have heard rumors of this new religion, fit only for Jews and slaves! How comes it, Onomastos, that you, a champion of the cestus, can hold such views?"

"It is but the other day that I saw the light, master; and then I vowed never again to raise my hand in anger against my fellow, nor to strike him rudely to make sport for others."

"But such a pernicious doctrine, were it ever to become at all common—which Mars forbid—would destroy this our world,

my son. There would be no more warfare. The cunning and unscrupulous would hold the bold and strong in bondage. Why, you would even destroy all sport; for each contender, solicitous to please his fellow, would strive to let him win. 'Twould be: 'Strike thou first, my dear Lucius!' 'Nay, my dear Cassius, after thee!'—with the result that all the arts of combat would fall into decay. Who would train as we do now, punching bags of sand, bending iron bars of varied grades of resistance, putting heavy weights, running up steep hills, anointing our bodies with olive oil, denying ourselves cakes, watering our wine, abjuring women? You would put the finishing touch to what we have seen here to-night, and make ours a world of none but women and weaklings!"

"It is true, Lutorius, that great changes must come when Christ is king in this world, as He is of the world to come; but not such degeneracy as you picture, since all would be kindness and mercy. War will go, and soldiers, and floggings and torturings; but sport will not go. For the mutilations and deaths of the circus, the tormenting of captives and wild creatures, it will substitute new forms of contest in which agility, quick thinking, and skill will mark the winner."

Lutorius was too dazed and shocked to listen attentively.

"Your deity is not human," he said. "I like better the old gods. They are cruel sometimes, hasty, jealous, but at least one can understand them; and if one seeks to appease them, they are generous. Not one of them but would despise me, were I to permit any man to smite me, and then turn to him the other cheek! Aye, Onomastos—he who smites Lutorius chews no meat thereafter for many a long day!"

The young Greek smiled sadly.

"I am too young in the faith to show you its beauties, master. I would that thou couldst listen to him who has succeeded the holy Petrus, who—with Paul, the great orator, and on the selfsame day—was martyred here in your Rome."

Lutorius looked up shrewdly.

"This is, then a recent whim of thine? I will wager there is some woman in it! Who is she?"

The deep flush that the young Corinthian could not restrain told the old man that his shaft had struck home. His mighty fist smote the table.

"I knew it! Women run after every new thing, and each drags after her some poor, befuddled male. Name the wench, Onomastos!"

"It is not so," the other protested. "I saw the truth for myself. It was Magnonia, a slave girl of my employer Pompilius, who first took me to their secret meeting place; but she said not a word to me about her religion. That I learned from their priest."

"Huh! What looks she like?"

The eyes of Onomastos kindled.

"Her hair is like the sunset, all red and gold. Her eyes are deep pools in which stars are reflected. She is slender, yet supple, and with a waist that my two hands can girdle."

Lutorius guffawed.

"That's the way all women look—at first," he commented. "I know Pompilius well. Many a fat bag of sesterces has he won upon me. I've a notion to have him soundly flog the wench for debauching thee!"

The eyes of Onomastos narrowed, and his lips drew back in an ugly snarl. His hand slowly closed, while up and down his long, smooth arms ran a network of hard, flat muscles. He leaned across the table.

"If you do, Lutorius, I'll kill thee, big as thou art!"

"What ho? So we sing another tune? I thought thy new creed forbade giving a blow, and now we prate of killing!"

Onomastos paled, and sank down on his stool. He wiped the cold sweat from his brow. After a while, he spoke.

"'Tis true, I admit. I have sinned. Forgive me!"

Lutorius laughed boisterously.

"Fear not that I will harry thy sweetheart, lad! And now, away with this silly prattle of peace and good will. When old Lutorius slaps thy pretty, unmarked cheek in the circus to-morrow, thou wilt not, if thou art indeed the son of old Epeus, turn him the other cheek. Thou wilt give him plenty to do to guard his own!"

## II

At that date the Colosseum was as yet only an architect's dream. The fashionable spectacles of Rome were enacted in the New Circus on the western bank of the Tiber—a structure of travertine stone, tufa, and concrete, with marble seats for ninety thousand spectators, and many and cun-

ningly placed corridors through which they could make their exit in five minutes or less.

Every Roman citizen could draw rations of food from public storehouses, and was entitled to free admission to the circus. All he had to do was to pay a small rental for his dwelling, and buy clothes—that is, sandals and toga for himself, with sheepskins for winter, and cloth for his wife to fashion into garments for herself and the children.

It was a life of ease and pleasure, but the noble Romans degenerated under it!

The forenoon of the day on which Lutorius was to try out the young Corinthian boxer had passed. The customary parade about the arena had taken place. Division by division, those who were to contend had paused before the emperor's *podium*—a sort of balcony directly above the arena, on its shady side, and had chanted their immemorial:

*"Morituri te salutamus!"*

Ranks of gladiators in heavy armor, nearly naked *retiarii* with their nets and tridents, light-armed Numidian horsemen, wrestlers, acrobats, files of captives chained to slow-moving chariots—men from countries whose very names were unpronounceable, with complexions ranging from reddish yellow to jet black, and with all sorts of strange garments and weapons, caused a crackle of eager comment to run about the endless tiers of spectators. They made the slow circuit of the arena, and were swallowed up in the subterranean dens below the seats, until the herald should summon them forth.

The morning had been devoted to the bloody spectacles which have been many times described—combats between polar bears and lions; between men and pythons; between warriors, each using his own peculiar weapon, and fighting sometimes in pairs, again in groups.

In the afternoon, the gladiatorial bouts and chariot races would take place. It was upon these that most of the wagers were laid.

During the noon intermission certain novelties, mostly of an acrobatic nature, were introduced to amuse the common people, who always retained their seats and fetched their luncheons with them. The court, the patricians, and most of the well-to-do usually left the circus at this hour, returning after a leisurely noontide repast.

Since the contest between Lutorius and Onomastos was not considered to be a real fight, it had been scheduled for the intermission. Because of it, a considerable number of the *nobiles*, as well as most of the confirmed gamblers, remained to get a line on the stranger.

The editor of the games himself was present, and of course his herald, aloft on a small platform. The first tier, overhanging the coping, and reserved for pontiffs, senators, knights, ambassadors, and magistrates, was about one-third filled. The second tier, occupied by the well-to-do, held as many more. The third, where the manufacturers and tradesmen sat, was nearly deserted. The emperor's *podium* was empty; but most of the Vestal Virgins, who were keen sportswomen, held their seats in the box immediately to the left of the imperial balcony.

Lutorius and Onomastos awaited their turn in one of the underground cells, low and vaulted, which opened through an iron grille to the yellow sands of the arena. Some of these cells were subterranean pits with ingenious appliances for raising the great, uncouth wild beasts which were sent to Rome from provinces beyond the rim of the world. One—a capacious one—was a rude mortuary, into which were flung the bodies of men and animals alike, the losers in the public games. The chambers were damp and chilly, although outside the sun smote the shimmering sand so hotly that across one end of the great oval structure a purple awning had been drawn.

To Lutorius, the forthcoming bout offered difficulties he had never before been called upon to face.

In Rome, sport was nearly as sacred as religion—was, indeed, an integral part of it. There was plenty of crookedness, as there always has been and will be in professionalism; but cowardice was almost unknown. To show a yellow streak was to offend the emperor, and the Vestals, who were priestesses; to infuriate the populace, which was Rome itself; in short, to commit sacrilege. If a slave, the quitter might be grateful if merely sewed into a bearskin and tossed to a pack of wild dogs. A freedman could be branded and sold into slavery.

All of this Lutorius had told Onomastos, but to no effect. Only upon his last appeal, that he would be discrediting Lutorius himself by a failure to make it a real con-



test, did the young Greek reluctantly agree to go through a hollow pretense of fighting.

This by no means solved the problem. The old boxer knew that the eyes of the keenest judges of form and technique in all the world of sport would be fixed upon them. Young Pompilius would be there, with his friends, and so would the book-makers, with their ivory tablets. The *lanistae* would read every move as if it were written in large script.

There was yet another complication. Lutorius knew the almost irresistible control of a thoroughly trained body over the mind. When an athlete had rounded into perfect form, he did involuntarily the things that his mind had laboriously acquired. Motion preceded conscious thought. It was Lutorius's task to knock Onomastos for a row of Corinthian columns, as it were, without seriously hurting him, and to make it appear that he had done so against real opposition.

Could he have counted upon Onomastos not to fight back, he could have managed it; but would not the young Greek fight back despite himself? Lutorius felt certain that, once in the old familiar posture, a feint would draw him out, and, before he realized it, he would be lashing out with the deadly *cesti*—the heavy bands of ox-hide with which the fists of the Roman boxers were wrapped. So the old gladiator had to think of his own defense, despite the Greek's insistence that he would never again strike a fellow man!

The herald's messenger interrupted his musings; and together the two boxers stepped out into the scorching sunshine, barefooted, and wearing only cloth girdles and their *cesti*. Had they been engaged for a real contest, they would have worn "limb breakers"—either circular rings padded for the hand to grasp, or leather gauntlets covered with metal knobs.

As they saluted the editor of the games, and squared off, the superb condition of Onomastos was evident to all the judges of human flesh who were present. Ten months of training of the severest sort had been undergone before he left Corinth. This had embraced the usual gymnasium routine, a splendid system of baths, and a diet in charge of the anointer, consisting largely of meat, after the method of Pythagoras, who had done away with the old régime of fresh cheese, dried figs, and wheat.

Onomastos had slept till late in the morning, had eaten from two to three pounds of pork, goat flesh, or beef at a sitting, had taken a stiff walk to aid digestion, and had worked steadily all day, with intermissions. In his sparring bouts he had worn soft leather gloves, with pads for his ears.

As for Lutorius, he was always in condition, though now a trifle heavy about the waistline.

The classic pugilist stood with his left foot advanced, his weight on his right foot, and both arms held well out. The hand was kept half closed, except in the act of striking. Clinching was not allowed, as the rough *cesti* would have lacerated the flesh too cruelly. Tripping with the feet was prohibited, as forming part of the technique of wrestling, rather than boxing.

There were no regular rounds, although a pause was allowed in case both contenders were too fatigued to go on, yet unwilling to quit. In such event, each rested on one knee. Defeat was acknowledged by lifting one finger. Trainers stood near, and freely coached their men.

The methods of the boxers were vastly different from those of to-day, and for a very simple reason. A single blow often decided a contest, and not infrequently caused death. There could, therefore, be no such thing as taking a blow to get one in, or a rapid exchange at close quarters. Extreme caution was displayed, together with prodigious agility and much feinting, until an opening offered.

Men were trained to hold out their arms heavily weighted. Often one waited until the arms of the other dropped from fatigue, and then pummeled him out, sometimes striking with both hands at once. One champion was said to be able to hold his arms out for two whole days at a stretch. Frequently he left the arena without a blow having been struck, save his final winning punch. It was the ambition of all to leave the ring unscathed—an ambition wherein Lutorius had failed signally.

The old gladiator received a great welcome, as he had been a favorite in Rome for two generations. Onomastos, too, was cheered heartily, for his record was as well known as that of any "home run king" of our time is to the sporting American.

In such a contest as now began, there would be much more action, though of a less murderous quality, than in the regular ring fights. Lutorius was counted upon



to put the newcomer through his paces. He was too canny to permit any of the trainers to draw too close, and warned them imperiously aside. He set himself squarely, advanced his arms, and his piercing eyes bored into the luminous ones of the son of his old opponent, Epeus.

Ere a minute had elapsed, Lutorius knew that Onomastos was quicker than he—quicker by some twenty years. He knew, also, that, even as he had anticipated, habit held the Corinthian in its clutch. When Lutorius, by an elaborate and crafty series of feints, tied the younger boxer into knots, and sent a ripple of laughter foaming along the marble bench, he read anger in the boy's eyes. A second later, leaving a pretended opening, he felt the stirring of the air as his opponent's *cestus* lashed out, just missing his jaw!

It would have loosened a few teeth, at the least, the old master thought, and smiled grimly to himself.

Shouts of admiration recognized the nimble leaps of the boxers, in and out or sidewise, the swift play of arms, the neat parrying or clever ducking.

The task of Lutorius was one of extreme delicacy. It was perhaps the hardest he had ever undertaken. It would not have been easy, even when performed upon an inert foe, and now, with Onomastos for the time forgetful of his new religion, the old gladiator must run the distinct risk of a counter that would bring his gray hairs to shame. To be knocked cold by a boy, in a practice bout, after holding the championship since before Onomastos was born!

There is, deep sheathed in the neck between the jugular and the carotid, a nerve known to every second-year medical student, who sometimes delights in playing pranks with it. It is the phrenic, which controls the diaphragm, and hence the respiration. Steady pressure upon it, or a swift blow, will produce instant though only temporary collapse; but one must know the exact spot to strike, and it is not too easy to find.

Lutorius knew it. Not in these terms, certainly. He merely knew that there was such a vital point in every neck. It was one of many things he had learned in thirty-five years of punishing gymnastics.

He had rarely availed himself of this particular bit of information, and then only when engaged in the *pancratium*—a combination of boxing and wrestling, the sever-

est form of contest known, which always endured till death or defeat. He had used pressure, and not a blow, upon the phrenic nerve. It was this desperate chance he now prepared to take, in order to incapacitate Onomastos without injuring him.

On one point, at least, his mind was relieved—no one would suspect Onomastos of not trying. His leads were now far harder than Lutorius's, and it was evident to all that despite his slenderness, he carried sleep, and perhaps death, in the ox-hide hammers that moved with the speed of vision.

So cunningly, so craftily, did Lutorius mislead the Greek, that Onomastos had no slightest suspicion that he was gradually being forced and inveigled around and into the sun. The onlooking trainers saw, and grinned at the familiar tactics of the old master. Most of the gamblers and sports saw it, too; but not until the full blaze of the sun smote him square in the face did young Onomastos know.

Before he could profit from his discovery, something else smote him, in the neck—something hard, and lightning quick. It was the extended thumb of Lutorius.

"Easy with him!" the victor warned the slaves who approached to drag off the limp body, while the circus rocked with shouts, catcalls, and whistles.

Down in the underground cell once more, Onomastos opened his eyes, blinked, swallowed hard, and sat up. Lutorius patted his shoulder.

"Thank you, my boy! Thank you for not disgracing old papa Lutorius! You deceived the best judges of Rome. They all thought you were really trying!"

Onomastos gulped. He turned red, and then white. Suddenly, his eyes were aswim with tears.

"God forgive me, I *was* trying!" he moaned. "I forgot all about *the other cheek* and everything! Why, Lutorius, I believe I tried to hurt you, to batter you down!"

"*Tchk, tchk!* Well, I declare! I never knew the danger I was in. It's lucky for me a chance blow sent you down."

Onomastos felt of his neck curiously. He passed one hand over his face, on which there was not so much as a scratch.

"What I cannot understand," he said at last, "is what really happened to me. I was trying to get out of the sun—and the

next I knew, I was here on my back. Well, one thing is sure—I'll never again draw a *cestus* over my knuckles. When I feel those cursed gloves, I forget everything but what I learned in the gymnasiums!"

### III

THE early Christians did not live in the catacombs, tradition notwithstanding.

None save Vestals could be interred within the walls of Rome. Along the stately Via Appia, and other roads outside the city, rose a double line of sarcophagi—miniature temples, Egyptian pyramids, austere tombs, where the patricians and the wealthy bourgeoisie laid their dead. The poor burrowed underground, and there, in long, crooked galleries, tier upon tier, slept the plebeians, the slaves, the nameless ones, the martyrs.

As the tunnels became filled, each shelf bearing its sleeper, new caves were excavated, following no fixed plan, connecting older passageways, crisscrossing, or ending abruptly. Here and there several of the warrens met, forming a sort of room, or cell. It was easy to get lost in the network of subterranean alleys. Many a skeleton has been found in some forgotten winding.

It was natural that bandits, criminals of all sorts, and runaway slaves, should take refuge in some of the numerous catacombs without the city walls. Only the immortal fear of the abode of the dead prevented a freer use of these uncharted and unlighted charnel houses. Men fled to them only when desperately harried. They died there, sometimes, and their pursuers, losing themselves in turn, more than once starved within a few yards of their quarry, but separated by thick ranks of the secretive dead.

To-day, guides take parties of tourists through a small fraction of four or five of the best-known catacombs; but there are miles upon miles into whose black and sinister streets no living foot has ventured for centuries.

It was inevitable that when persecution befell the early Christians, they should flee to the catacombs, as had other tormented fugitives. They learned to know these intricate mazes as no one else knew them. They had a hundred short cuts and exits. They turned one or two of the larger focal points to their ritualistic uses. Here they brought the mutilated bodies of those who,

in the arena, defied the terrors of fire and cross and wild beasts for their faith.

But in no sense can they be said to have lived here, as a community, or for any extended period. No one could live for long in these damp, sunless, miasmatic burrowings into the pestilential breast of the Roman Campagna.

Lutorius, before parting with Onomastus after their brief but spirited clash in the New Circus, had promised to attend a service of the new sect, and to hear from the lips of its arch priest the tenets which had made Rome, hospitable to so many diverse creeds, inflexible to stamp out this simple faith founded upon love and service.

First, however, he had a delicate mission of his own to perform. As a follower of the oriental cult of Mithras, in common with most soldiers and gladiators, he gave devout thanks that Onomastus was still safe. Not yet did any one suspect that the Corinthian boxer had become a pacifist, unwilling to give and take in the rough sports of the arena; but the truth would be known all too soon, unless Lutorius could carry out the plan that his astute mind had devised. In furtherance of this, the very day after the exhibition, the old boxer paid a visit to the palace of Pompilius, the leading sportsman among the young patricians.

He was fortunate enough to find him at home, and disposed to receive Lutorius, upon whom, as has been said, he had won many a wager, and for whom he felt as warm a regard as a *nobilis* could evince for a man of the lower classes.

He greeted the veteran familiarly, though without rising, offered his hand, and ordered a slave to fetch a flagon of Setian wine and some fruit. He waved Lutorius to a couch near his own.

"And how fares the undefeated champion of three generations?" he asked. "I took note that our much heralded Corinthian did not joggle the wreath upon thy gray dome!"

"It is of that I would speak, Pompilius. Thou hast shown me many kindnesses. Thou wert ever the first to back me in my matches, and to share generously with me when I won."

"Which was invariably," commented Pompilius.

Lutorius bowed.

"I have heard that this young Onomastus has a contract with thee."

Pompilius made a wry face.

"That is so; and, if I am any judge of form, he's not likely to fatten my purse overmuch. What think you, since you tried him out?"

Lutorius threw out his hands and shrugged his massive shoulders.

"That a great mistake was made in permitting so young a champion to leave home. In earlier days, Greece produced the finest boxers of the world. The Ionians excelled the Dorians; Rhodes, Arcadia, Ægina, Elis, sent us masters who taught us all we lacked; but we have outstripped them these many years. We have nothing to learn from them now."

Pompilius nodded. These facts were perfectly well known to one who was himself a student of the game, and who had received many lessons from old Lutorius.

"But what shall we do with the newest recruit for our stable?" he asked.

"Onomastos has everything but experience, Pompilius. Speed, strength, courage—all are his now; but it will be some seasons ere he acquires ringcraft. The first second-rater he is matched against here in Rome will mutilate him so that his own mother would repudiate him; and that would probably destroy all his self-confidence, so that thereafter he would never win a fight."

Pompilius sighed.

"I was a fool to sign him up; but it seemed that the champion of Greece—at such a figure as I got him for—was a bargain. What shall I do? Will you take him in hand, Lutorius, and keep him under cover until such time as he learns at least to keep out of the blinding rays of the sun?"

"Pompilius, thy wishes are my commands; but it were far better that he should return to his native land for a season, there to continue his training. He has not yet reached a point where the finishing touches can be imparted; and I am too old and weary to enjoy teaching rudiments which he can get as well from another. Let me send him to a good man I know of in his own city of Corinth."

"But would he go? Will he not—as he can—hold me to my contract with him?"

Lutorius shook his head.

"Not so. He knows, since our little set-to of yesterday, that he is not yet ripe for the Roman circus. I can promise that he will waive his contract, and for the bare

passage money home—a matter of perhaps two talents."

"That relieves me of a burden, Lutorius, and I take it most kindly; but, since you have faith in our young cockerel, will he not be snapped up by some of my rivals when at last he comes to his full stature as a boxer? Would I not do better to pay his wages until such time, rather than lose a future winner?"

"I will pledge my own word," Lutorius earnestly stated, "that he will never put his signet ring to contract with any save thyself."

Pompilius raised his glass of wine to the gladiator, nodded, and drank.

"Thy word suffices," he said briskly.

"I thank thee, old friend. Now, how may I show my gratitude in better guise than by mere words?"

"I am, among my fellows, reckoned a man of property," Lutorius said. "I have lived abstemiously, and have put by most of my winnings. I would not be beholden to any; but, as a plain matter of business, I'd fain purchase from thee a slave, unless she is indeed a special favorite."

The eyebrows of the young patrician rose.

"And what may she be called?"

"Magnonia is her name."

Pompilius laughed boisterously.

"Why, thou old Silenus! Dost think so pretty a maiden as she will learn to love thy thickened ears and broken nose because they represent victories won when she was in swaddling clothes?"

"Not so, Pompilius; but I am unmarried, and lonely. I would, if we can bargain together, give her freedom, and adopt her as my daughter."

"*Humph!* Well, she is naught to me, and you can have her and welcome; but, first, my wife must be won over. Magnonia is one of her handmaidens."

Half an hour later, after a genial bickering in which the good-natured Pompilius sought to sell the slave girl for less than she was worth, while the sturdily independent Lutorius refused to consider his purchase as aught save a strictly business transaction, he departed as sole owner, body and soul, of his first slave, and at a price which had made a sad hole in his savings.

Pompilia, her mistress, had expressed indifference. It seemed that the girl's interest was so bound up in a new and silly sect from Palestine that repeated floggings



had failed to make of her the servile handmaiden the haughty young matron demanded. But she agreed that for the present, and until her new master could make use of her, she was to remain with her.

Pompilia smiled ironically, Magnonia wept bitterly when told that she was now the chattel of a pagan pugilist, and Pompilius insisted upon regarding the affair as a huge jest.

"This marks thy finish, old friend!" were his parting words. "Remember, the *cestus* of Venus is mightier than that of the gladiator!"

A classic joke, hinting broadly that poor old Lutorius, having in his ripe years turned toward feminine pulchritude, would do well to avoid future appearances in the ring.

#### IV

It was now mid forenoon, and Lutorius bent his steps toward the *Cestus Tavern*, where he was to find Onomastos, and to proceed with him to one of the meetings of his sect.

The inn of the gladiators presented a sleepy appearance at this hour. Save for the young Greek and a tipsy muleteer, there was nobody in the room when he entered.

Together they passed through the *Su-burra*, saluted constantly by the street loungers, to all of whom the old boxer was well known, and followed by half naked urchins, much as a champion fighter is followed in our own day when he appears in public.

They passed by the Temple of Minerva, crossed the Forum of Augustus, and followed the *Via Lata*—the famous *Corso* of medieval and modern Rome—until they passed beyond the limits of the city. Here, almost at once, they found themselves in a bleak and almost deserted countryside. Herds of goats browsed in the meadows along the river, while long-haired cattle moved toward Rome in stately droves. Wild-looking shepherds dressed in skins, with strips of leather wound about their feet and legs, a band of gypsy mountebanks lounging about a small fire of twigs and dried grass, and far down the highway a convoy of merchants from Gaul—these replaced the swarming life of the city streets.

Onomastos branched off across the rough bracken, following a faint path toward a clump of ilex half a mile away. He spoke but seldom. Despite his new vows, and

his abjuration of boxing, he was young and hot-blooded enough to feel a little resentment over the outcome of yesterday's exhibition. Also, he was vastly astonished. There remained on his neck no mark, no soreness. He could not imagine what had caused him to collapse so suddenly, losing consciousness and becoming helpless as a child.

He strove against this irritation as unworthy of a Christian; but it persisted, none the less.

Just beyond the ilex trees, a rough-looking fellow hailed them. To him Onomastos showed a little copper fish, and murmured: "Blood of the Lamb!"

Whereupon the man stood aside and parted a thick-growing bush, revealing an opening in the earth, which sloped down at a steep angle, and into which Lutorius followed his guide.

After a few yards the tunnel turned sharply, and became so dark that he was obliged to cling to the hand of Onomastos; but directly thereafter, a lighted torch thrust into an iron sconce cast a ruddy gleam upon the bare earthen walls and the rough pathway. To right, and to left, until Lutorius had no manner of idea as to whether they were moving toward the city or away from it, they plodded on.

Now the passage became higher, and cleaner-cut. On either hand, tier above tier, were stretched the coffins of the dead, most of them sealed in mortar, others crumbled away and exposing fragments of bone which belonged to men who had perhaps helped Romulus to lay the first rude courses of the Eternal City.

On many of the graves were engraved rude emblems. Votive amulets and broken cups were lying amid the remains of those whose families had long since become extinct. A bronze tablet was incised with a prayer to the god of some forgotten cult, whose very name was strange to Lutorius.

It was fully fifteen minutes before a murmur of voices, and the beacon of other lights, indicated that they were nearing the end of their journey.

The room in which Lutorius presently found himself was perhaps the very first Christian church of Rome. It was some ten yards square, high-vaulted, with a lantern hanging from above, and with crude portraits in distemper upon its walls. Among them was one of St. Peter, depicted as a thin man of less than middle stature,



with a pale face ringed by woolly hair and curly beard, and with bloodshot eyes. He had no eyebrows, and his nose, though long, was rather flat.

Opposite to him was St. Paul, a short, thickset man with a bald forehead, and handsome, agreeable features. His long, thick hair and beard were streaked with white. About the heads of each had been drawn a gilt nimbus.

At one end of the room stood a wooden altar, dominated by a plain cross, with a goblet of wine, a loaf of unleavened bread, and two candles. The candlesticks were of gold, magnificently embossed, and they struck the sole note of splendor in a place which was otherwise severely bare, lacking even a chair.

An elderly man wearing an embroidered mantle stood before the altar, and kneeling about the room were some twoscore men and women. To Lutorius's amazement, these, while mostly poor folk of little account—slaves, laborers, shepherds, fishermen—included two or three legionaries, a magistrate, a wealthy jewel merchant, and the wife of a senator. These few were all well known to him by sight, and he could not be mistaken.

While he was pondering this unexpected discovery, the priest began to address the gathering. Throughout the sermon, or lecture, and the simple mass which began immediately thereafter, Lutorius was struck by the apparent similarity of their creed and his own—the worship of Mithras, the soldiers' god. For, strange as it may seem, Mithras was regarded as of virgin birth, having been created from a rock, and as having suffered voluntary martyrdom for a sinful world. Also, his followers met in dark and secret places, and partook of water and bread.

His reflections were interrupted, in the very midst of mass, by the agitated entry of the rough-appearing man who had guarded the entrance to their catacomb. He whispered hurriedly to Onomastos, and to others. It appeared that some traitor had betrayed their meeting place, and that even now a band of armed men was threading the labyrinth, to seize one of their number, a runaway slave.

Even as the watchman was talking, there came the sound of distant shouts, the faint clank of metal. A dozen men rose from their knees, Onomastos among them, and followed the sentinel. The old priest paid

no attention to the interruption, but proceeded steadily with his ritual. The women and children, together with a few aged men, remained, though uneasily, upon their knees. Lutorius followed the others, keeping close to Onomastos.

It was a place of many shadows; but of the torches which brought these ancient graves to a hideous simulacrum of life, none were carried by the hunted. In profound darkness they advanced to meet the armed force which had invaded their gloomy sanctuary.

Only a handful of the Christians were armed. The soldiers bore their short swords. A shepherd held his stout crook grasped with both hands at its center, like a quarter staff. A fisherman clutched a short, ugly knife with a saw edge. Lutorius wished that he had with him one of his knobby *cesti*, a blow from which would crack an antagonist's skull like a rotten walnut.

"Wait here," whispered Onomastos.

He posted himself at one side of the opening of a cross tunnel, from which they could see the approaching lights, and could distinguish voices which bawled advice as the attackers hesitated at some forking of the way. His friends had scattered, and Lutorius surmised that they were guarding the numerous openings which led to the central chapel. He doubled a great gnarled fist, and waited in silence.

Suddenly the foe was upon them. Instantly, from a black crevice on their flank, two Christian legionaries leaped out, thrusting with short, deadly jabs of their swords, creating much confusion, and killing or disabling half a dozen assailants before they went down under overmastering odds.

A moment later, a bearded and helmeted head lunged into the opening of their tunnel. Lutorius, grunting with the force of his blow, caught the intruder's jaw with the full reach of his right, and cracked it like a coconut shell. Another man, who stumbled across the body, was arrested and straightened by an uppercut that started from below the old boxer's waist, and fell back with his entire face beaten flat.

Then it seemed as if the entrance was choked with screaming fiends, who came on faster than Lutorius could swing his fists. He was aware that across from him Onomastos had seized from its grave an immense bone, the thigh of some old Roman, and was using it as a club. The sound of

dead bone on living, the oaths of blood-crazed men, the gasp of outraged lungs, the sickly smell of fresh blood mingling with the dank breath of the tomb—of all these things Lutorius took note subconsciously; but he did not, at the time, feel any pain as his knuckles were dislocated and his hands made raw and bleeding, so that the masseur and anointer would work over them for many a long day before he could don a *cestus* again.

It was just as he and Onomastos, despite their frenzied defense, were forced back and away from their posts by the sheer mass of the assailants, and while they bled from a score of cuts and thrusts delivered haphazard by men who saw them dimly in the obscurity, that a frightful series of yells indicated that some sort of diversion had been created in the enemy's rear.

A great kettle of pitch, kept over its ready-laid kindling for just such emergencies, had been brought to the boiling point; and from an upper gallery two Christians were now ladling it out upon the men who choked the tunnel below. The blazing hot mass trickled over heads and arms, found crevices and chinks in helmet and breast-plate. Where the victims tore at their intolerable burns, chunks of living flesh came away in their hands.

In an instant, a wild stampede followed. Two minutes later, all who could use their legs had fled. From tunnel mouths crept the Christians, to bend over the wounded, friend and foe alike, and minister to them. Five were dead—two of their own number and three others. These were laid decently in the chapel, with faces covered. Later on they would swell the silent population of the old catacomb.

Onomastos, blood streaming from a cut across one cheek, stood among the victims whom he had laid low with the thigh bone that he still clenched in his hand. He was breathing heavily, and in his eyes gleamed a ferocious joy. Lutorius smiled, and touched his friend's arm—gently, because his own hands were swollen and tender.

"How now, my Christian? It seems you forgot to turn the other cheek!"

Onomastos started, dropped his strange weapon, and passed a bloody hand across his face.

"Lutorius, I learn fast. I am young in the faith. Magnonia—she heard Paul himself speak upon the Aventine; but it appears that I have not yet grasped the whole

truth. For even St. Peter drew his sword to smite one of those who took our Lord, and he suffered no more than a rebuke. And Paul himself bade his followers, when they fight, to *strike out as one belaboring the air!*"

"So then, one uses his discretion, and either turns the other cheek, or breaks the jaw of the smiter?"

"I think it must be that we are to endure ignominy and abuse, when no principle other than selfish pride is involved; but that in defense of our sacred rites and our loved ones, we must fight the good fight. I shall seek further light on the matter."

"And I," said Lutorius, ruefully examining his swollen hands, "shall seek Rusco, the anointer, and see if aught can be done to these faithful servants of mine!"

## V

A SMALL craft, rigged for a single bank of oars, slid down the Tiber on the swift current. The rowers lounged on their thwarts, while aloft on a stern decking the tall figure of the helmsman was outlined against the stars.

Up forward, two men conversed in tones so low that the slapping of the wavelets against the bilge, and the croaking of frogs on the near-by shore, were audible to them, though unnoticed.

Onomastos, at the request of Lutorius, had met him after nightfall on a quay, and had boarded this boat, which was laden with merchandise to be transferred to a waiting vessel at Ostia, the port of Rome.

"I see not why we could not have talked as well ashore," wondered the young man. "This voyage seems a piece of folly, since we must walk back to Rome, or hire a horse."

Lutorius smiled in the dark.

"Thou art not returning to Rome, son of my old and honored foeman Epeus, nor yet tarrying at Ostia. You are embarked upon a long voyage."

Onomastos started violently.

"How mean you, Lutorius? And who appointed you to send me hither and yon, or to manage my affairs?"

"Some level head was needed, my son! It must be plain to you that Rome is not the home for you."

"If that be thy tune, sing it to the water fowl that I hear feeding in the marshes!" declared Onomastos. "By Zeus," he add-

ed, forgetting himself, "I'm leaving you now, though it means a swim!"

He started to rise, but the old man thrust him back with an arm as thick as an oak limb.

"Sit still, and listen to me! Must I throttle you like an unlicked cub?"

"You may be able, by your old craft and cunning, to outpoint me in the *pugilatus*," snarled Onomastos; "but no living man ever thrashed me in a rough and tumble. I'll have no—"

"Hold thy peace!" interrupted Lutorius. "There is plenty of time to swim ashore; but it is unnecessary, for, after hearing my reasons, if you still remain unconvinced, I will have yon steersman guide us inshore, where you may land without wetting your sandals."

The other sank back against the bulwarks, though sulkily.

"What of your contract with Pompilius? You can be jailed for breaking that. If obdurate, you can be sold into slavery. You are a boxer by trade. That is all you know; but with strong muscles and an intelligent head—of which latter I'm not yet sure—you may, in some new place where you are unknown, obtain honest employ, and haply learn a new art. To play the flute, peradventure; but not in Rome. You come heralded as champion of Greece. In two weeks, you abjure the *cesti*, and would be Mithras knows what—a cobbler, perchance. Ask yourself, Onomastos—are you

stubbornly set upon martyrdom in Rome for the glory of thy God, or the bright eyes of a woman?"

Onomastos coiled like a cobra, and his face went pallid in the starlight. Lutorius saw that in another instant the hot-headed youth would be beyond control.

"Well, then, hear my last word," he said; "but not from my lips!"

He clapped his hands sharply, the act surprising and arresting the Greek.

From a group in the waist of the boat rose a slender figure, and moved slowly toward them. The face was visible only as a gray patch. A long gray mantle fell to the feet. Yet, the instant he saw her move, Onomastos's eyes widened, his mouth breathed one word:

"Magnonia!"

The girl daintily picked her way amid the bales and cordage, and presently stood before them. Onomastos rose, his arms hungrily questing. She raised her face to his. Reverently, with a passion that was almost religious in its fervor, the young Corinthian bent and kissed her smooth, dusky cheek.

Lutorius turned aside with a sigh.

He had won; and yet, at the moment of victory, he felt old and alone. He touched the girl on her shoulder, and she turned wondering, humid eyes upon his old ones.

"Magnonia," he whispered, "remember thou art a Christian maiden. Turn the other cheek!"

## HEROICS

LET'S put heroics to the touch—

Oh, not unkindly, but in fun.

You say you love me, dear, so much

That you would ten times sooner die

Than live without me. Good! And I,

Hating of course to be outdone,

Reply:

"Buck up, old girl! I hope you'll marry  
Some rich young chap and raise Old Harry!"

As for my wanting you to take

Another husband, that's a pose,

Just as your prayer for death's a fake—

Both brittle figurines of speech;

And yet as forms they fill a breach

Practical deeds can seldom close;

For each

Hides in its shell this heroic kernel—

Love aims to be self-effacing, eternal.

Richard Butler Glaesner

# A Heritage from the Sea

WHAT CAME DOWN TO TWO WOMEN OF EARLYPORT FROM  
THEIR ANCESTORS OF WHALING DAYS

By Edward Boltwood

MRS. DE FOREST marched briskly to the pillared entrance of the Earlyport Athenæum, drumming a quickstep on her sport skirt of white silk with a perky cane. She hurried from the August sunshine into the portico, seized the knob of the library door, and set her pleasant chin executively. In the summer colony at Earlyport, and in various philanthropic associations in New York, young Mrs. De Forest's pose was that of the executive matron, habitually short of time.

After the door had rattled behind her, Mrs. De Forest's chin wavered. The village library always subdued her, somehow. She had declared only yesterday, on the casino piazza, that five minutes in the Athenæum would take all the pepper out of Douglas Fairbanks himself.

The cavernous room seemed especially somber and silent that forenoon. Mrs. De Forest dragged her cane on the matting of the gloomy aisle, which led between dark bookstacks to the delivery counter. Two women behind the counter surveyed her impersonally. Their chairs were raised by a platform, giving them a sort of magisterial effect, and the visitor had a feeling of being arraigned in court.

"How do you do, Miss Swain? Good morning, Miss Danvers!"

"Good morning," said Alpha Swain, in her calm voice.

"Morning," gently echoed little Miss Danvers.

"I hope you and your cousin have discussed my offer," said Mrs. De Forest, addressing Alpha, although Caroline Danvers was by far the older. "I've got to know your decision. I'm leaving on the afternoon train. Our board meets next week in New York to fill the two places."

Alpha twirled a penholder in her strong

fingers. She was a handsome woman of thirty, tall and well formed, with black hair and a dusky skin.

"Caroline and I are ever so much obliged to you, Mrs. De Forest; but we didn't need to discuss your offer. We can't accept it. We can't go away. Some of our folks have run the Athenæum from the year it was built, back in the whaling days. This old library is kind of in our blood, I guess. We've both taken care of it ever since we were girls, and we've just got to stay."

"I believe you're making a great mistake; but what's the use?" Mrs. De Forest shrugged her trim shoulders. "Well, I shall see you next summer, Miss Swain. Good-by, Miss Danvers."

"Yes, ever so much obliged," murmured Caroline.

Alpha dipped the pen in an inkwell and resumed her task of copying cards for a new catalogue, which was not in the least degree needed. The card catalogue instituted by Caroline's grandmother was still perfectly adequate. Many of the cards bore Mrs. Danvers's copperplate script; many had been written by Alpha's mother. Her loving hands caressed the cards as she copied them slowly.

Caroline took a dust cloth from a cupboard and went to the museum alcove, near the desk. Here were arranged relics of Earlyport's bygone prosperity, when the whaling fleet of the New England town almost rivaled Nantucket's or New Bedford's. A rack of harpoons and lances hung against the wall. Affixed to the shaft of one of the lances was a rude silver plate:

-Presented to Bull Danvers, boat steerer, by Captain Nehemiah Swain, 1847.

Shelves were covered with outlandish curios from islands of the Pacific. Behind



the glass front of a locked cabinet were carvings of Japanese ivory, strange gold coins, and pieces of oriental porcelain.

A timid frown of disgust wrinkled Caroline's thin, gray face. In her meek way, she hated the museum alcove. Dusting the rack of irons, she groaned faintly. Alpha looked up with an understanding smile.

"I told Dr. Randall again this morning, Caroline, that those things never did belong here. I told him that the trustees ought to clear out the whole alcove. My gracious! A library is meant to make people think about books, and not about deep-sea voyages!"

"Well, what did he say?"

"He said that I had no right to talk, because I was named after a whale ship myself, and that the harpooners of Earlyport really built the Athenæum, after all."

"Oh, no!" sighed Caroline. "It wasn't the Earlyport men who started the Athenæum. It was the women. What did such men care about libraries?" She blinked through her spectacles at the inscription on the whaling lance. "I guess you and I know about those old sailors, Alpha," said she. "Your grandpa and mine, and those dreadful doings at Samoa! Wild rovers—that's what the Earlyport whalers were."

"They were not librarians, dear, at any rate," smiled Alpha, bending over the desk.

Caroline gazed at Alpha's bowed head, and suddenly her heart leaped in an ecstasy of love so passionate that she pressed her fluttering bosom with her slender hand. She remembered, days afterward, that she had never felt so happy as at that moment. She remembered always that picture of Alpha, bending over the catalogue cards, like a nun over a breviary, shielded from the world, as if behind convent walls, by the solemn ramparts of the books.

Then the door flew open, and a tanned, burly man swung down the aisle, whipping the bookstacks with the leathern peak of his blue cap.

"Why, Alpha Swain!" he called. "How is it with you, after these twenty years? Why, Alpha!"

## II

FROM the library steps, Mrs. De Forest hailed Dr. Randall across the slumberous village street. He leaned obediently on the fence there, and she joined him.

"They turned me down," she announced.

"Of course!" he chuckled.

"But, doctor, how wrong! The jobs at our mission house would exactly suit those women. They'd be a lot better paid. They'd do interesting things among interesting people. They'd begin to live, instead of vegetating. It's wrong!"

"My dear madam, you are speaking to one who has vegetated in Earlyport for more than half a century."

With a laugh, Mrs. De Forest brandished her cane at the pillared portico.

"Alpha told me just now that the library was in their blood; but isn't anything else in their blood—enterprise, progress?"

"Let me give you a tip," said Dr. Randall, resting his elbow comfortably on the fence. "I know the Earlyport blood. It's a heritage from the ancient days when our men went in for whaling and our women went in for book learning. Enterprise? The old-time Yankee whalers were the most enterprising adventurers in the world. Hard men, often brutal. Why, for instance, we've got a whale spear in the museum that one whaler gave another, as a delicate souvenir, for saving his life by having killed a murderous Samoan with it in a fight started, I've heard, by a native girl. But our women balanced the scale. Our women sought education and refinement as keenly as our men sought whales and—other things. A hundred years ago, you might not have found more advanced culture in America than among the women of the rich New England whaling towns, although most of the men had none. That's the double heritage in our Earlyport blood. Tickets for my next lecture may be bought at the drug store."

"Well, Alpha and Caroline inherit through only the petticoat side, then," observed Mrs. De Forest.

"Maybe," said the doctor. "For that matter, deep-sea sailors are never in sight, afloat or ashore, at Earlyport nowadays. Our present degenerate fleet devotes itself to rum running and pleasure boating, and we harpoon nothing except the amiable summer visitor."

"But I still mean to harpoon your librarians, Dr. Randall. I suppose I couldn't harpoon one cousin without the other?"

"Decidedly not, although their cousinhood is only of an indeterminate variety—fifth or sixth, perhaps. Neither has any closer kin, and they keep house together. Poor little Caroline would doubtless die of desolation, if—hello, hello!"

Randall grinned as he watched a blue-capped man ascending the steps of the Athenæum.

"Who is that, and what are you grinning about?" demanded Mrs. De Forest.

"That is Zimri Nickerson," the doctor told her. "Zimri came back yesterday. Hasn't been here since he was a schoolboy. I am grinning because I just assured you that deep-sea sailors are never in sight at Earlyport nowadays. Well, Zimri is a solitary exception!"

### III

CAROLINE DANVERS went home from the Athenæum that day in a vague mist of fear. She knew what it meant to be afraid. She had known the dread of solitude, and of ill health, and of poverty—definite, reasonable fears, commonly faced by women in her circumstances; but the fear which came to her that day was the more cruel because it was vague and indefinite. She could not reason about it, could not face it. Her fear of Zimri Nickerson was like a cold mist, impalpable and bewildering.

Day by day thereafter, it was through this fog that she saw Zimri at the library, where he volunteered to set the museum to rights.

"Let's make all shipshape," he explained.

He even produced a stone and jocosely sharpened the whaling irons. Through the fog, Caroline descried him in the prim parlor of the Swain house, where she lived with Alpha. To Alpha he was constantly talking, telling her of distant seas and the marvelous tropics.

He had a master's certificate at last, he told them, and in October his owners would give him command of the Monticello, in place of Captain Carr. He had made two voyages to China as first officer of the Monticello. She was a fine vessel, and Captain Carr was a fine man, and Mrs. Carr was a fine woman. There were fine quarters for the captain's wife aboard the ship.

Meanwhile, it appeared, Zimri was killing time in Earlyport. The Earlyport men were pretty slow company—excepting Dan Shattuck, perhaps. Did Alpha remember what a lively kid Dan was at school?

Caroline would rather have heard about even the disreputable Dan Shattuck than about the voyages of the Monticello; but Alpha asked for further details of the beautiful coast line from Diamond Head to Honolulu.

"Why, I'll show you my photo album," said Nickerson. "Mrs. Carr and I took some dandy pictures, that cruise."

So he brought the album and sat on the parlor sofa beside Alpha, turning over the leaves, while Caroline, across the room, shivered in the cold fog of her fear.

"We have books in the Athenæum about those places, Alpha," she said, after Nickerson had gone.

A mysterious light, new to Caroline, burned in Alpha's eyes.

"Oh, books!" she breathed. "Books!"

"I hope," ventured Caroline timidly, "that we can finish the new catalogue by Christmas."

Thus against Zimri Nickerson did Caroline begin to marshal her feeble forces, laboriously devising wistful little schemes to remind Alpha of their winter's work. Was it time to plan the annual report? She proposed that they should copy the catalogue cards at home in the evening. A convention of librarians was to be held in Boston soon. Could not Alpha manage to attend it?

"It's my guess, Miss Caroline," suggested Zimri, "that you'd suit a lib'y convention better'n Alpha would."

The three were on a bench in the side yard of the Swain house. It was a warm Sunday afternoon, and Nickerson's shirt sleeves were rolled up over his big forearms. He had been clearing away the weedy rubbish which had long concealed the fallen and forgotten figurehead of a ship. The wooden image, now propped upright in the yard, crudely represented a woman with uncovered breast and wind-swept hair.

"I'll bet she's rounded both capes a plenty, that old girl," said Nickerson. "I'll bet she's off one of your grandpa's vessels, Alpha—maybe the one you were named for."

"Poor lady!" laughed Alpha. "Smothered under the weeds until you—until we set her free!"

"Free?" he questioned. "I'll bet that girl won't ever be properly free without deep-sea spray on her cheeks."

"Poor lady!" repeated Alpha; and her shoulder twitched oddly against Caroline's.

Mumbling an excuse, Caroline went indoors. She felt, in reality, a trifle faint. Her tender heart was wrung by a bleak sense of helplessness, like a clamp of ice. From the parlor window she could see Al-

pha and Zimri beside the figurehead. Alpha was smiling and touching the tattooed dragon on Nickerson's arm with the tip of her finger.

Caroline, forlorn and panic-stricken, leaned against the mantel, and her hand jostled an ancient daguerreotype. It was a portrait of her grandfather—Thomas Danvers, the boat steerer. She looked at the square, bony, indomitable face and underhung jaw. Obviously there had been reason for Bull Danvers's nickname.

Caroline had never seen him. His pictured face gave her no comfort. She was forlornly conscious that he must have despised all weaklings who took trouble without a fight, lying down.

At their supper table, Alpha spoke hardly a word; but after they had washed the dishes and lighted the parlor lamp, she abruptly told Caroline that she had decided to go to the librarians' convention.

"I've always wanted to," she added. "I'll bring back some new ideas for the winter cataloguing, Caroline. Why, what's the matter?"

Caroline was wiping a fine moisture from her spectacles.

"Oh, I'm just glad!" she said. "I'm glad you're not forgetting the Athenæum, Alpha. Sometimes lately I've thought—kind of thought—"

Her meek voice trailed off to silence. She became aware again of her grandfather, Bull Danvers, on the mantel. Well, he need not yet be ashamed of her. She was still unbeaten!

#### IV

ALPHA went on an afternoon train to Boston; and early in the evening of the next day, Caroline received the letter. She read it at the post office on Pacific Square.

DEAR CAROLINE:

I am not coming back. Zimri Nickerson and I shall be married here to-morrow, and sail for Panama. You will soon forgive me for making the change in this way, without the distress of a spun-out good-by. I want you to stay in the house forever, and you will find all about it in a note for Dr. Randall under my pincushion. Remember that I am very happy and shall love you always. This other love is in my ocean blood, I guess.

The October moon seemed to mock Caroline with its bright serenity when she left the office. She tried to nod bravely to people on the sidewalk. She must not let them suspect that anything had happened.

The minister's wife chaffed her about meeting a beau. She replied somehow, and pushed back a lock of gray hair with her tremulous hand. Her knees shook, too. At the corner of the square, she had to stop and pretend to be fastening her wrist bag.

Dan Shattuck strolled observantly by, in company with the mate of his rum-running barkentine.

"Has that old skirt got a jag?" snickered Dan. "Maybe we can sell her a case before we pull out!"

Caroline faltered around the corner into Sperm Lane. She was afraid of breaking down. Her knees shook dreadfully; but where could she go? Not to the Swain house—not yet to the Swain house, with the ghost of Alpha on its threshold.

She gazed helplessly toward the foot of the descending lane, and there she saw the quiet ocean, gleaming to the horizon like a vast sheet of hammered silver. Its tranquillity, like the moon's above, seemed to deride her. Where could she, also, find peace to-night?

Suddenly her heart quivered as a tautened hawser quivers astern of a tug. She half closed her eyes and stumbled up the lane. She knew what was pulling at her heart—knew at last where lay her refuge.

The mail-time loiterers had disappeared, and there was nobody to notice Caroline as she crossed the square and fluttered along the deserted street like a wounded bird seeking cover. The serene white pillars of the library gave her a tranquil welcome. A timid smile of gratitude nestled on Caroline's wan face. Here was her place of peace, her heritage. She groped in her wrist bag for the key, and touched the knob; but she found that the broad door was already unlocked.

Caroline drew back. She stared blankly at the disused building next to the Athenæum, and at the vacant houses across the silent street. Then she pushed open the door an inch or two.

A chair scraped on the floor at the other end of the dark room. Somebody was in the library.

Who? Who but Alpha? The instant conviction that Alpha had returned dazzled Caroline like a burst of flame. She noiselessly opened and closed the door. All in a dazzling moment, she felt sure that Alpha had come home again, perhaps contritely, perhaps—

"Alpha, my dear, my dear!" implored



Caroline, gliding through the dim passage of the central aisle.

Near the window of the museum alcove, Zimri Nickerson stood revealed to her by a ray of moonlight. Stock still, he confronted her, with his head low and his elbows bent.

## V

"Who's behind you?" he growled. "Speak soft, or I'll—you alone?"

Caroline could not speak at all, except for a frightened sob.

"Come here to me, then," ordered Zimri. "Sit down. Well, I'll be damned! You're alone, hey?"

Rubbing his chin, he scowled at the frail, submissive figure in the chair, then at the dark shadows beyond the alcove.

After nearly a minute, the scowl vanished. Nickerson slapped his leg with the relieved air of one who has solved a problem, and his cuff dragged on the neck of a bottle in his coat pocket. Having disentangled it, he jerked the flimsy cloth cover from an empty shelf.

"You know too much for your own good, Caroline, old girl," said he thickly. "Boston train, ten fourteen. Just time enough!"

She dropped sidewise in the chair, so that her shoulder pressed against the rack on the wall. Zimri fumbled for his watch. As he drew it out, a number of gold coins fell from his pocket to the floor. He crouched to recover them, cursing sullenly when his head struck the swinging door of the museum cabinet.

"A thief!" gasped Caroline.

Nickerson began to rip the cloth into narrow bandages.

"Shut your noise!" he warned her. "You're going to be made fast to that chair for a nice night's sleep, with a nice gag in your jaw. One yap out o' you, and, by Judas, you're better dead! Un'er—understand that?"

"A ship captain, and a drunken thief!" she whispered.

"Cap'n nothing!" denied Zimri. "Don't believe all you hear, poor fool!"

"You lying scoundrel!" said Caroline.

Her own voice startled her; she felt strangely uncertain that it was herself who had spoken, and uncertain even that it was Caroline Danvers who now stood up and leaned on the wall rack. A painted idol, in the moonlight across the alcove, gri-

maced at her with its horrible scarlet mouth and a Fijian war mask leered hideously. If she was Caroline Danvers, why was she not afraid, pitted against a brute in this uncanny place?

Her right hand, reaching backward for support, clasped a smoothly rounded bar of hard wood.

"A low-down whelp marry my Alpha!" said she, and gripped the wood so tight that it tingled in her hand, like a charged wire.

"What's that?" he grunted. "Alpha Swain? Why, I'll tell you about her! Tomorrow morning me and Alpha'll be safe aboard ship together, headed south. You needn't worry about Alpha. Marriage won't be our style!"

Caroline's left hand flew backward as a piece of iron flies to a gigantic magnet. She fingered a small plate, sunk in the wooden shaft.

"No, not our style," laughed Nickerson evilly. "I guess Alpha won't turn out the sort men have got to marry. Easy picking, Alpha'll be!"

Fastened to the shaft by her left hand, Caroline whirled half around, and snapped her right hand on the lance again. She was like a swift machine, moving without volition, without sound. The tingle of the wood was now a dynamic vibration that seemed to weld her to the shaft. Her body seemed to be but a metallic extension of the old whaling spear.

Nickerson looked up from a knot he was tying in the cloth. A sharp twist of amazement contorted his face grotesquely.

"Put that down!" he blurted.

Those were the last words he ever spoke to Caroline Danvers. Of him, her last remembrance was a horrible, scarlet mouth that merged with the mouth of a painted idol, prostrate on the floor beside him, and equally motionless; but of what immediately followed, she remembered nothing.

When her senses returned, that night, Caroline found herself alone in the parlor of the Swain house. She never knew how she had made her way there. All she knew was that when the mantel clock rang eleven, she was staring at it, still dressed for the street, with her wrist bag on her arm.

The lamp was unlighted, but she could see the daguerreotype next the clock. Suddenly she felt benumbed and very cold. A panic of horror seized her. She sank on her knees before the portrait.



"His work!" she moaned. "Bull Danvers's work!"

## VI

IN January, Mrs. De Forest journeyed to Earlyport to push the progress of a new casino. As she bustled from the Pullman, she espied Dr. Randall, waiting on the station platform.

"To meet me?" she queried.

"Alas, no!" admitted Randall. "To meet, on the contrary, an ugly box of dull books; but the express agent forbids. May I escort you uptown?"

"By all means. Books? Such a literary physician!"

"Well, I am not solely a physician. I am also president of a public library. And we have to fill an extra alcove, you see, now that the museum is given up."

"Oh, yes!" said Mrs. De Forest. "I read something about it in the *Guardian*. What happened?"

"Whoever knows, won't tell," replied the doctor. "Our janitor, soon after day-break, discovered that thieves had picked the lock of the library door and raided the museum. The crooks must have enjoyed a drunken fight there. A broken gin bottle

was on the gory scene, and a trail of dried blood ran to the wharf from which Dan Shattuck's barkentine had put out during the night. The bold Dan'l and his gang and his rakish, black craft haven't been heard of since. Neither has Zimri Nickerson. Q. E. D."

"And that's the whole of it?" asked Mrs. De Forest.

"That," declared Dr. Randall, "is the whole of it."

They rounded a corner and perceived two women approaching them on the brick sidewalk.

"Here are the love birds you planned to separate," Randall observed, under his breath. "Let me advise you that they are even more happily in love with each other than ever before."

"Really? What makes you think so?"

"I don't merely think so—I know it," emphasized the doctor.

"But the plan is off," smiled Mrs. De Forest. "How do you do, Miss Swain? Good morning, Miss Danvers!"

"Good morning," said Alpha Swain, in her calm voice.

"Morning," gently echoed little Miss Danvers.

### THE MOUNTAIN MOON

ON the hyacinth marge of twilight,  
In this most magical weather,  
The new moon over the mountains  
Hangs like a golden feather.

OVER the cloven summit,  
While the delicate dusk grows denser,  
It deepens in radiant amber  
Till it glows like a burnished censer;

JUST as we saw it, beloved,  
In the dear dream days departed,  
Shedding its shining aura  
On two that were rapture-hearted.

NEW moon over the mountains—  
Over the mountains yonder—  
Bear to my sweet this message,  
Wherever she may wander—

TELL her nor time nor distance  
Can alter the words once spoken;  
That faith is a light unfading,  
And troth is a pledge unbroken!

Sennett Stephens

# The Token

## THE STORY OF A STRANGE INTERNATIONAL CONSPIRACY

By Louis Tracy

Author of "The Wings of the Morning," "The House of Peril," etc.

THE English police are investigating what seems to be an extensive conspiracy engineered by foreigners in England, for purposes which are more or less of a mystery. The Hon. Peggy Mainwaring—daughter of Lord Copmanthorpe, a cabinet minister—and her maid, Monica Jackson, have become involved in the affair through happening to pick up a curiously mutilated coin—a half crown punched with dagger-shaped marks forming the Roman numeral "IV." The losers of this coin, or token, are apparently determined to recover it, for Monica is kidnaped from Lord Copmanthorpe's residence on Curzon Street, in London, and taken to a secluded house near Dorking, in Surrey. The police surround this place, and liberate Monica, though the house is fired by a bomb and its inmates escape through a tunnel, wounding two of the policemen as they flee.

The police officers playing leading parts in the investigation are Detective Inspector Furneaux, of Scotland Yard, and Inspector MacDermott and Sergeant Linton, of the Surrey County Constabulary. Sergeant Linton has entered the police after holding a commission in the army during the war. He is evidently much interested in Miss Mainwaring, of whose social status he is unaware, knowing her only as a companion of Monica Jackson, and supposing her to be a fellow servant of some sort.

### VIII

AT half past eight o'clock on the following morning the Hon. Peggy Mainwaring was in the breakfast room of the house on Curzon Street, when the front doorbell rang. Believing that there might be additional tidings as to Monica's welfare, she hurried to open the door of the breakfast room, and was in time to hear a high-pitched and rather squeaky voice ask the second footman to produce Mr. Hobbs as quickly as possible.

"In-deed!" was the sarcastic reply. "An' who might *you* be, may I ask?"

"A very proper question, Jeames, though absurdly phrased," said the voice. "You really ought to have inquired my name and business, while such a little word as 'sir' would have supplied a polite addition. If the butler is still in his room, let me see you skip upstairs two steps at a time, and tell him that Detective Inspector Furneaux, of the Criminal Investigation Department, wants him at once. Perhaps he sleeps in the basement, but, whether high or low, send him here on the jump."

Meanwhile, the second footman had

caught sight of a closed car, with a driver in police uniform, waiting at the curb, so he changed his note.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said. "If you come with me, I'll take you to Mr. Hobbs's sitting room."

At this point the Hon. Peggy appeared on the landing.

"Bring Mr. Furneaux here," she said. "Mr. Hobbs can join us when he is ready."

Like every other human being who met the famous detective for the first time, she was surprised, almost dismayed, when Furneaux confronted her. He did not measure up in any respect with her preconceived notions of Scotland Yard and its occupants. The detectives who had visited the house after the attack on Foster and the abduction of Monica were quite obviously policemen in plain clothes, but this bright-eyed, natty little man, wearing a well-fitting gray tweed suit and carrying a straw hat, answered exactly to Superintendent MacDermott's description of him, and might have been either a fashionable jockey or a leading comedian.

She thought that the valiant men who pursued and caught criminals must carry

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with them the implements of their dangerous trade, yet she was sure Mr. Furneaux's pockets could not possibly harbor pistols, handcuffs, or truncheons. He did not even carry a stick, and the smooth outlines of his waistcoat did not suggest the presence of a concealed match box, much less of a deadly weapon.

"Did I understand you correctly?" she began, motioning her visitor to a chair. "Are you Detective Inspector Furneaux?"

"Yes," he said. "And you?"

"I am Miss Mainwaring."

"The girl who accompanied Monica Jackson to Box Hill yesterday?"

"Well, yes—you can put it that way, if you like."

"Suppose we put it another way, Miss Mainwaring. What is your exact position in this household?"

"I am Lord Copmanthorpe's daughter."

Furneaux's face seemed to be covered with parchment-colored skin, which creased now with merriment, recalling to the girl's mind the cheerful grin of some member of the Japanese Legation whom she had met socially.

"Ah!" he cackled. "They don't know that at Dorking, eh?"

"I gave them my name and address," said Peggy, trying to hide a blush behind a teacup. "By the way, have you breakfasted, Mr. Furneaux?"

"I have been doubtful, ever since I sniffed your bacon and eggs," he admitted.

Mr. Hobbs entered at the moment, and showed his butlerlike qualities by receiving with undisturbed gravity an unexpected order to procure more tea and the materials for a second breakfast.

"I take it you need not attend to these trivial matters in person, Mr. Hobbs," said the detective. "Each minute is valuable this morning, and I want to hear Miss Mainwaring's story and your own as to yesterday's events, while I eat."

"In one moment, sir," said Hobbs, hurrying out again.

"Do you wish Mr. Hobbs to know all about your personal adventures?" inquired Furneaux, whereat Miss Peggy lifted her eyebrows.

"Why not?" she said.

"It is not for a mere man, a shrimp of a fellow like me, for instance, to enter into the complexities of a woman's mind, but I am under the impression that you were masquerading a little yesterday afternoon,

Miss Mainwaring. If so, Mr. Hobbs, who is already sufficiently obtuse, may be left in that blissful state."

"But he knows everything!"

"Splendid! You, then, are the young lady whom the society newspapers describe as the Hon. Peggy Mainwaring?"

"Yes."

"But the Dorking police believe you are a lady's maid or companion?"

"Did Sergeant Linton say that?"

"Yes. The confession nearly choked him, but he had to make it."

"When next I see him, I'll undeceive him. He was very rude to me last night."

"Indeed! Tell me about that."

"Oh, rudeness is a harsh term, perhaps, but he might have been more explanatory when he rang up to say that Monica had been found. How is she?"

"Recovering rapidly, I am told; but let us keep to this matter of Sergeant Linton's rudeness. Ah, sit down, Mr. Hobbs. I'll be ready for you in a moment. I think you are mistaken, Miss Mainwaring. Sergeant Linton had gone through an extraordinary experience, for which, let me say in strict confidence, he is to be promoted and decorated, as he undoubtedly saved Monica Jackson's life by risking his own—risking it knowingly, too. Moreover, the wire was in demand for circulating descriptions of certain persons wanted by the police—very much wanted, I assure you. However, that is by the way. Please tell me, in your own words, all that happened yesterday."

The Hon. Peggy's eyes sparkled for an instant, for she felt that the little detective was treating her like a spoiled child; but sheer interest in the drama in which she had played some small part conquered this momentary pique, and she gave a lucid and consecutive account of events since the breakfast hour of the previous day.

Mr. Hobbs corroborated, though his knowledge was slight. Neither he nor his mistress could supply any information as to the Curzon Street episode, because the malefactors in the car had vanished before the occupants of the house found Foster lying on the pavement.

Furneaux ate while he listened. He spoke once only, to assure his hearers that the detective, though seriously wounded, was regarded by the house surgeon at St. George's Hospital as not being in a hopeless condition.

Foster's vague and faltering recollection of his assailant's appearance seemed to tally with Miss Mainwaring's equally vague portrait of the younger man whom she had seen in the roadway opposite the King's Head.

"It amounts to this," said Furneaux. "One or all of you three people in the tea garden—and Sergeant Linton, almost certainly—may be able to recognize that scoundrel, if you see him again at an early date; or, again, you may not. Are you engaged to-day, Miss Mainwaring?"

"No, not particularly. Indeed, I was thinking of motoring to Dorking to see Monica."

"Just what I was going to suggest. I am calling for Superintendent Winter at headquarters, and then we make straight for Dorking. Will you come with us?"

"Gladly. Shall I order the car?"

"I have one at the door."

Mr. Hobbs cleared his throat as a preliminary to speech, but Furneaux forestalled him.

"Exactly," he said, speaking for him, with much gravity. "Mr. Hobbs was about to warn you against acting on impulse. You really should not be so ready to gad about with mere strangers. I may not be an emissary of Scotland Yard at all, but a plausible villain meaning to carry you off in broad daylight. Even the presence of a police chauffeur is no real safeguard, as uniforms can be bought from any theatrical costumer. Mr. Hobbs, therefore, will accompany us as far as the Embankment, when both he and you will be convinced of my *bona fides*. That all right, Mr. Hobbs?"

The butler had really intended to protest against his young mistress's further participation in this extraordinary affair without Lady Copmanthorpe's cognizance, but yielded instantly to the prospect of a visit to Scotland Yard, with the reflected glory for himself in the servants' hall.

Somehow, Peggy sensed this, and could not help admiring the detective's tact.

"Very well," she said, rising. "I'll just get a wrap, while you finish your toast, Mr. Furneaux. Five minutes—not a second longer."

"Just one moment," he cried. "Are you dressed to-day as you were yesterday?"

"No—oh, no!"

"Please take ten minutes, and change into the same costume. Mr. Hobbs will

agree with me, I am sure, when I recommend that your actual identity need not be disclosed at Dorking."

"Won't Monica—"

"Let us take the chance, at any rate."

The butler now regarded Mr. Furneaux as a most sensible person—a model of discretion; but Peggy was sure that the detective was humbugging Hobbs, and probably herself. She was convinced of this when his beady black eyes twinkled in response to her own smile.

She reappeared in the hall well within the stipulated time. The butler, whom Furneaux had warned not to say a word to any one, though he twisted the advice into the semblance of its having originated in Mr. Hobbs's own judicial brain, was already seated by the side of the driver. It was then nine o'clock, and Peggy was actually throwing a dust cloak over her shoulders when the telephone rang.

Furneaux nodded in response to her look of inquiry.

"Better see what is wanted," he said.

Peggy's response to the caller was free from all ambiguity.

"Sorry, Bobby," she said, "but I'm just going out. I really don't know what time I shall return. Of course, you're peeved, old thing, but I can't explain now—I've got to rush. Yes, I'll ring you up at the club, or somewhere. What? Oh, rubbish!"

"Lord Robert Ferris," she explained, tripping down the steps. "He was awfully hipped when I wouldn't tell him anything."

"It certainly is difficult, sometimes, to be explicit over the phone," agreed Furneaux. "Linton discovered that last night, I imagine."

Peggy shot a glance at him, but he was opening the door of the limousine.

"I'm sorry to have to take you out of town at such an early hour," he went on, as the car sped through Mayfair; "but, in a case like this, we are desperately anxious to get ahead of the newspapers. You see, by noon to-day all England will hear about Foster and the blowing up of that house at Dorking. We have just two working hours left—"

"The blowing up of what house, Mr. Furneaux?"

"Ah, I forgot! You have not heard what happened last night. Thanks to Linton's really clever action, the police discovered at least one of these rascals' haunts. It was there he rescued Monica Jackson



from the immediate death which threatened her in about half a dozen different ways. I said nothing of this before the estimable Hobbs, who would expire from spontaneous combustion if he tried to retain within his portly bosom the sensational story you will hear while we run to Dorking. I suppose you think I am taking you there to cheer up poor Monica Jackson. I'm not. She is ill—very ill—not physically, but mentally. A local doctor thinks she will not recover her speech for a week at least. Indeed, I am doubtful if he will allow you or any one else to see her, lest her memory should return too soon."

He paused—deliberately, his hearer thought.

"I'll ask questions or remain silent, whichever you wish, Mr. Furneaux," she said quietly.

He cracked the forefinger and thumb of his right hand joyously.

"The one woman in ten thousand!" he cried. "Well, here is your reward. I'll tell you something few people know. When I'm up against a really big affair, such as this promises to be, I feel—or think I feel, which is the same thing—the working of a sixth sense, which, in operation, resembles the action of static electricity. Do you know what that is?"

"If it's the new system of reading the meter, it's a horrible fraud."

"A perfect reply, though weak as a definition. When two powerful bodies are in direct electric communication, another current, far less potent, but definite enough, is set up parallel with the known one. It can hardly be accounted for, but it exists, and can be utilized. Some influence of the kind often reveals its presence in criminology. I am sure of it. In the present instance you and Sergeant Linton—quite unconsciously, of course—represent the opposite poles of that minor current which is flowing alongside the stream of evil forces that has drawn you within its area during the past few hours. While I am with either of you, or both, I do honestly believe I shall be in closer touch with some far-reaching and tremendous scheme, or plot, designed for dire purposes whose scope I cannot yet even guess at. And now, please forget what I have told you, because my colleague, Mr. Winter, is convinced that my theorizing is all moonshine. Probably he will say so forcibly, thus leading to a row; and you would be distressed if we

bickered all the way to Dorking. Indeed, it would be a sin on this lovely morning."

Peggy laughed.

"If Mr. Winter is as interesting in his way as you are in yours, I shall have the time of my life during the next hour," she said. "But what in the world will happen when I meet Sergeant Linton? Will there be a sizz and a bang?"

"I hope not," replied Furneaux emphatically. "You know what happens when a fuse gives way—all the lights go out, and there is a scurry for candles. May Heaven protect a great many innocent people if we are plunged again into darkness in this case, Miss Mainwaring! I believe, and I say it in all seriousness, that your sharp eyes yesterday, when they saw that half crown burying itself between two curbstones, snatched a lightning glimpse of something which menaces our very life as a nation. But here we are. Have you ever before visited Scotland Yard? Its architecture is beneath contempt, but it is a most interesting place, for all that. Its records range from the secrets of kings to the wanderings of lost umbrellas. Ah, there is Winter, waiting for us! He is not smoking—a bad sign! He is worried. What's gone wrong now, I wonder?"

## IX

IF the foregoing history of one complete day culled from the hitherto uneventful career of the Hon. Peggy Mainwaring has induced the belief that the young lady in question differed in any material attribute from thousands of girls of her age and social position who are to be found in Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia—wherever, in fact, the ideals and the manners of our race are inculcated from birth—such an impression, founded possibly on the tragic incidents with which she was associated by fate, should be dissipated forthwith.

She was merely a good-looking, healthy, well educated, and pure-minded young woman. She had the ease and vivacity which spring from certain fine qualities of heart and brain, when cultivated in an excellent soil and fostered by favorable environment. Owing to her youth, the horrors of the great war had left her unscathed. She was a devoted daughter, a cheerful and amiable friend, an adept in many field sports, yet utterly feminine and unspoiled.

Hitherto, her life had been passed in pleasant places. Now, for the first time, she was brought face to face with some of the sordid elements in human affairs—things which she was hardly able to visualize when she read of them in newspapers and books.

It is not surprising, therefore, that even the spiriting away of the parlor maid and the attempted murder of Foster should fail to penetrate deeply into her immature consciousness. She regarded these happenings as somewhat on a par with a nasty fall after hounds, or with what she herself would describe as a "regular purler" on the ice.

It is true that she was frightened and tearful when the unfortunate detective was carried into the hall of the Curzon Street house by Hobbs and the second footman, and she saw the dread evidence of the murderous attack which had been made on him; but the ingrained instincts of her social order demanded restraint and coolness in all circumstances, and she rose to the occasion, being far more self-possessed than the two men. For the moment, therefore, she was more curious and interested than shocked.

Furneaux, versed in the complex of the feminine mind, appreciated her qualities to the full, and meant to use them without stint until Lord and Lady Copmanthorpe interfered, which would be about one minute by the clock after they realized what sort of amazing experiences their only daughter was being committed to.

Peggy liked Mr. Winter at sight. He was big and solid and preëminently British, a man of oak reinforced by steel. His head, body, and limbs were large and round. His prominent, wide-apart blue eyes and expressive mouth seemed framed for humor and the sheer joy of existence, rather than for the analysis of crime and the pursuit of criminals. Equally with Furneaux, he did not suggest the detective of either romance or actuality. Peggy found herself thinking that she had met many such men at agricultural shows in the shires, or among the guns on her father's moors and pheasant drives.

If Mr. Hobbs was capable of entertaining the suspicions put into his well ordered domestic brain by Furneaux, they were banished forever by the respectful demeanor of those members of the staff at New Scotland Yard who entered or left the building

during the couple of minutes the chief stood in the doorway. When Mr. Winter was introduced to Miss Mainwaring, he expressed approval of her presence, though somewhat guardedly. Then he beckoned to a young but grave-looking man in mufti, who seemed to be awaiting orders.

"Sheldon," he said, "I shall be at the Dorking headquarters by noon. Give me a ring, if anything special should turn up. Don't go out until you hear from me. You know as much of this business as I or Mr. Furneaux, so take any action as you think fit, if the occasion arises."

"How odd!" said Peggy, when the car was *en route* again.

"What is it that strikes you as odd, Miss Mainwaring?" inquired Winter, who, to Furneaux's delight, had been eying her covertly.

"The man you spoke to has one eye smaller than the other, or the other eye bigger than the one. Which is it?"

"Both. You are already reported as a close observer. Not many young ladies would have noted such a peculiarity at a glance."

"Is that what Sergeant Linton said about me?"

"Yes, but he also is intelligent."

"Please, won't you smoke?"

Winter instantly whisked around toward Furneaux.

"Have you been taking away my character?" he demanded wrathfully.

Furneaux's wrinkled features registered, as the motion pictures have it, a pained surprise.

"I?" he chirped. "I only said you were not smoking, which is a sign that your normal state of fatuous complacency has been disturbed."

"But won't both of you smoke?" put in Peggy timidly.

She had yet to learn that the Big-Un and the Little-Un of the Yard, when hot on the trail of evildoers, snapped at each other like an ill-tempered mastiff and an impudent terrier.

"The gallant *caballero* by your side, Miss Mainwaring, needs only the merest whiff of encouragement to produce a series of gigantic Havanas, which he partly smokes and partly devours," explained Furneaux bitterly. "This nauseating habit of his is the bane of my life. I hold that tobacco not only tends to atrophy the senses, but—"

"It is a closed car," broke in Winter. "Would you care for a cigarette yourself, Miss Mainwaring?"

"Well, just one, if Mr. Furneaux doesn't really—"

"What? Don't mind him. He has other compensating vices. Now, before he can deliver his stock essay on the deleterious effects of nicotine—of course, not being a smoker, he poses as an authority on the habit—tell me something about Monica Jackson. What sort of girl is she? Would you regard her as of well balanced mind?"

"Oh, yes—she is bright and agreeable, and most willing and contented. Mother says she is a model servant."

"Mother?"

"Yes—Lady Copmanthorpe, you know."

"I ought to have told you that this young lady is the Hon. Peggy Mainwaring," said Furneaux suavely.

Winter did not hesitate a fraction of a second.

"Just so," he said, favoring his aid with a frosty smile. "I have been so busy this morning that the peculiar intricacies of family names in the British peerage escaped my attention. Even in the Yard, Miss Mainwaring, we supply similar puzzles for strangers. For instance, Mr. Furneaux is known as Frog."

"In such trivial matters the aristocracy shows more wit and much better taste than the police," commented Furneaux.

Peggy tittered, though fully alive to the fact that half an hour earlier the little man had been no more aware of her identity than his chief.

"I rather connived at a sort of alibi yesterday," she confessed. "You see, father is ill in Scotland, and mother has rushed away to nurse him, and she would be dreadfully upset if she heard that I was mixed up in this affair. Of course, I shall write her fully to-day, but I really don't want her to see my name in the newspapers first."

"Mr. Winter having now scored heavily all around—mark you, I say 'heavily'—perhaps it will be as well if I reveal what took place near Dorking at a late hour last night," said Furneaux. "I am not usurping my chief's prerogative. It will take him at least five minutes to get that wretched cigar to draw properly."

Thenceforth, for the time being, at any rate, all banter ceased between the two, and Peggy received an astonishingly full

and accurate account of the Dorking drama. MacDermott had supplied the whole story over the phone that morning, about half past seven. Some of it was new, even to Winter. When his colleague made an end, he said thoughtfully:

"This man Linton strikes one as being rather out of the common. Who is he?"

"At present an acting sergeant in the Surrey County Constabulary. MacDermott says he will now be made an acting inspector."

The eyes of the two men exchanged an unspoken word. Unknown to Peggy, the chief did not utter the thought in his mind, since it was quite obvious that Furneaux had not answered his question.

"I hope we shall meet him this morning," was what he said.

"Oh, yes—that is arranged. MacDermott sent him to bed about one o'clock, so that he might be fresh for to-day's hazards. Old Mac himself remained up all night. He will not escort us through the ruins, but he promises to have luncheon ready soon after half past twelve."

"It will be thrilling to hear what Mr. Linton really saw when he went into that awful place," commented Peggy.

Her companions looked at her and smiled—Furneaux with approval, and Winter with an air of astonishment.

"It is a pity you are the daughter of a cabinet minister," said the chief. "I could promise you a job in the C. I. D."

"You have a very important one now, at any rate," cried Furneaux.

"Does that mean I am what Americans call a 'live wire'? How flattering! But I feel I know so little, and I dread asking for information."

"Why?" demanded Winter.

"Because—because you two may have in your minds a great many facts which cannot properly be divulged to an outsider like myself."

"No," said Winter reflectively. "That is not so. We have under remand a pestilent fellow who was caught selling a peculiarly dangerous drug in a Regent Street restaurant the other night, and on him was found a half crown marked almost in the same way as the coin that you found. There are indications, too, that the morale of some of the public services is being undermined in a subtle but quite indefinite way. That is all. The combined outrages of last night may or may not be connected



with these other circumstances. The whole affair is rather bewildering. It is evident that *mon vieux* and his associates set out for London the moment they ascertained Monica Jackson's address. Their only object, then, could be to force from her some understandable reason why the damaged half crown had been changed for another; but she did not know. Neither did her friend Fred. I incline to the view that in the ordinary course of events she would have been questioned closely, and bundled out of the car unharmed on some lonely road, if she retained her wits, and said nothing about Sergeant Linton; but the appearance of Foster on the scene altered the situation entirely. Her captors saw, then, that the police were on their track, and it was vital for their safety that they should probe the full extent of the girl's knowledge. That is why they kept her under the partial influence of an anæsthetic all the way to Dorking, and threatened her with torture the moment she was allowed to regain her senses. From the manner in which the house was first protected and then destroyed, with a tunnel provided to facilitate the escape of the occupants, it is clear that they expected, sooner or later, to attract the attention of the authorities. That their plan failed was due to no fault of theirs. In this case we have to deal with a master mind, an intelligence of the highest order—"

"You see, therefore, how justice is handicapped from the outset," Furneaux could not refrain from saying.

Winter waved aside the interruption with a certain magnificence of gesture.

"I believe," he went on, "that science, rather than police experience of criminal methods, will have to solve the problems before us. Admitting that a battered half crown does not call for treatment by test tubes and retorts, it is possible that the coin, as a symbol, may have a psychological basis. Whole continents have been plunged into war by queer tokens of the kind. The Indian Mutiny was foreshadowed by the passing from village to village of a *chupatti*, or baked cake made from millet. Africa can supply scores of instances of similarly far-fetched but potent influences. Usually, as Mr. Furneaux knows well enough, I leave to him such strange delvings into the peculiarities of human nature—"

Unluckily, the chief's active brain balked

for an instant, so his waspish aid seized the opportunity.

"But as this affair seems to spring from a warped mentality, no doubt you feel competent to analyze it," he broke in.

Sad to relate, for a girl so carefully brought up, Peggy was beginning to enjoy the society of these ridiculous detectives. Her difficulty was to separate the wheat from the chaff in their talk. She could not be quite sure when they were in earnest, and not merely engaged in the harmless pastime generally known as pulling each other's leg.

Being singularly clear-minded, however, she remembered everything they said—literally, that is, and quite apart from the significance the words seemed to bear at the moment they were uttered.

"Why did you ask me if I regarded Monica Jackson as—how did you put it?—of well balanced mind?" she inquired.

"Because she seems to have yielded rather suddenly to the strain placed on her," Winter promptly replied.

"Is she really very ill, then?"

"Not ill, but shocked out of her wits. You see, it is a fair deduction that she was kept in a semiconscious state for an hour and twenty minutes. She is physically uninjured, so she could only have heard certain threats; and, no matter how terrible they may have sounded or appeared, she was not subjected to them longer than five minutes. The very fact that she must have been partly under the influence of an anæsthetic argues a condition of less than normal mental susceptibility. What, then, caused such a collapse that a doctor at Dorking should assure us that her brain will not function properly during the next seven days, at least?"

"Poor Monica!" murmured Peggy, and her eyes glistened with imminent tears.

"Do you know that we are passing the house where Nelson lived for many months at a time, when not at sea?" said Winter, after a pause.

"Please don't stop talking about this horrid business just because I sympathized with Monica's sufferings," protested Peggy.

Winter laughed cheerfully.

"I haven't another word to say about it," he admitted. "I have only been theorizing—a bad habit caught, no doubt, from Mr. Furneaux."

"The only interesting fact you have staged thus far is the reference to Nelson's



residence at Merton," snapped the little man. "I suppose even a well brought up young lady like you, Miss Mainwaring, has read of his love affair with Lady Hamilton, and has admired the fair Emma's portraits by nearly all the famous artists of her period. Well, the other day I chanced on the memoirs of a French countess, who, as a little girl, appeared in *tableaux vivants* with Lady Hamilton at Naples, and I was surprised to learn that the lovely creature was very fat."

"Whereas Nelson was thin as a herring," added Winter.

Peggy began to understand that her queerly assorted companions played into each other's hands with singular skill. Indeed, not another word did they utter about the business of the hour until the car was halted at a gate on the left side of the road from Leatherhead to Dorking, and a policeman peered in through the open window.

"Will you please give me your names?" he said.

Then he signed to a colleague to open the gate. MacDermott had certainly taken care that no unauthorized persons should visit the scene of last night's extraordinary occurrences until the police inquiry ended.

## X

THE car ran on nearly to the front door of the house. It was stopped abruptly by a tall young man in a gray suit, a golfing cap, and brown shoes, who called out to the driver:

"Pull up, or your tires will be cut to ribbons by broken glass!" Then he looked into the car. "May I ask—" he began, but his glance fell on Peggy. "You here, Miss Mainwaring?" he cried, evidently prepared to disbelieve his eyes.

"Sergeant Linton?" said Winter.

"Yes, sir."

"Ah! I am Superintendent Winter. This is Mr. Furneaux. Fortunately, Miss Mainwaring was at liberty this morning, so we brought her with us."

Linton smiled a welcome, though his reply was strictly official.

"I am glad you are in the center of a police cordon to-day," he said, permitting an appreciative glance to dwell for a moment on the girl's eager, slightly flushed features. "We know now that you were in a position of very real peril yesterday afternoon. It is only the mercy of Provi-

dence which saved you from sharing the fate of your friend Monica."

Winter happened to catch an almost imperceptible drooping of Furneaux's left eyelid, so he said nothing, being interested, too, in the Hon. Peggy's attitude. She, however, ignored everything save the apparent implication that Monica's illness had taken a bad turn.

"She is not any worse this morning, I hope?" she said, in quick alarm.

"No—somewhat quieter, the doctor thinks, but he finds it hard to judge, she has swallowed so much bromide. Last night I thought she was dying or dead. By some rascally means she was driven clean out of her senses."

"Ah!" said Winter. "Tell us just what happened after you and the others surrounded the house."

By this time the four were standing on the carriageway between the ruined walls and the flower bed. Linton pointed out the clump of laurels which had screened MacDermott, the two policemen, and himself. In simple, soldierly language he explained the sequence of events.

Two, at least, of his hearers were surprised by his manner and appearance. Winter, of course, had never before either met him or heard him speak. Peggy, who had noted his well bred air during the few words they exchanged outside the King's Head Inn, was even more bewildered now. She knew that an acting sergeant of police must have been an ordinary constable not so long ago, whereas this young man was as well spoken and conventionally correct as her friend and devoted admirer, Lord Robert Ferris.

These minor considerations fled before the tense interest of Linton's recital. He had learned the trick of literal accuracy, rather than using generalities, in stating facts, and Peggy shivered when he told of Monica's horror-stricken cry:

"Ah, no, for God's sake! Not that! Not that! Take it away!"

No one interrupted until he spoke of what he had seen through the broken window—the open black box on the table, the meal spread but not consumed, the hardly visible form of a woman, and the something that had scuttled out of sight under an armchair.

"Scuttled?" cried Furneaux. "Why do you use that word?"

"Well, I hardly know," admitted Lin-

ton. "It is the one that occurs to me most readily."

"Might not this thing, whatever it was, have wriggled?"

"Yes." He hesitated a moment. "By Jove!" he cried then, gazing at the diminutive detective with wide-open eyes.

"A snake, of course! What else?" squeaked Furneaux. "What did the first woman hate and dread more than any other created object? Why has every woman born since Eve was expelled from the Garden of Eden hated and feared serpents, though, in countless millions of cases, she may never have seen one save in captivity? That fellow, *mon vieux*, must be a veritable devil. How well he knew how to chill the very soul in an impressionable girl by suddenly producing a snake, which he threatened to allow to bite her if she refused to talk!"

Peggy was too thrilled for words. Linton realized at once that he was listening to a deduction which could only be arrived at by genius; but Winter brought them back to actuality by saying:

"Is that room entirely destroyed?"

"Absolutely, sir. The condition of the outer walls is bad enough, but the interior of the house was consumed by a chemical fire of extraordinary fierceness. It did not rage longer than a couple of minutes, yet look at the havoc it wrought on the trees."

The chief nodded. Those prominent blue eyes of his had taken in a great many details already.

"Have the ruins been searched?" he asked.

"No, sir. Mr. MacDermott persuaded the chief of the fire brigade to leave them as they are. In the first place, no form of life could have survived the flood of poison gas. Secondly, he could not be sure that the firemen themselves might not be sacrificed to no purpose. Thirdly, he wanted you and Mr. Furneaux to find the place untouched by other hands."

"Good! I expected as much from your superintendent, whom I have known for years. Well, sergeant, now that the third chapter of Genesis has supplied a clew, go on with your story."

Linton told of the gas cloud appearing, but glossed over the risk he took in waiting to carry Monica Jackson to safety. He gave a vivid word picture of the explosion and the fire, and of the almost tangible blackness which shrouded the locality when

some chemical fire extinguisher was freed, probably by a time fuse.

Cruddas and Tomlin, he explained, were doing well. Cruddas, though apparently the worse injured of the two, had escaped a fatal abdominal wound by the buckle of his belt having diverted the bullet.

"We have found the exit of the tunnel," he went on; "but here again it was decided to await your arrival before searching it. I have a number of gas masks in readiness, and I suggest, with all deference, that they should be worn by those who enter."

"Why?"

"The heavy chlorine gas used in the house would flow into the drains and cellars, and it is doubtful whether either the explosion or the fire would expel it thoroughly. One whiff means instant death. Why take a chance?"

"You took a dozen chances when you ran around that table, grabbed Monica Jackson off the couch, and thrust her through the window," said Winter.

The eulogy made Linton blush like any flurried schoolgirl.

"I acted then without thinking," he explained hesitatingly. "Now, it is different. I have been here for at least an hour, and have had plenty of time to survey the ground."

"What do you say, Furneaux—the tunnel first?"

Winter seemed to be suddenly galvanized into action. He almost startled Peggy by his change of manner.

"By all means," agreed his colleague. "It has probably caved in, but what does that matter? The tunnel is the obvious. Let us get rid of it. Linton, will you act as guide?"

"But, please, what becomes of me?" pleaded Peggy.

"You remain where you are till we come back," ordered the chief.

"May I not walk through the grounds?"

"Mr. Furneaux has just reminded us that young ladies who stroll through gardens unaccompanied are apt to get into mischief; but, if you promise absolutely to keep well away from the house, I see no reason why you should not circle it. Indeed, you may come with us to the mouth of the tunnel. You will be interested. Furneaux in a gas mask is a grotesque of the first order."

"Whereas my respected chief wears one quite naturally," said Furneaux.

Sergeant Linton looked puzzled, as well he might, but Peggy stifled a giggle by a cough.

## XI

"By the way, sir," said Linton, as they skirted the dismantled dwelling, "may I ask if there is any news of the gang?"

"None whatever," said Winter. "They seem to have vanished off the map. You were remarkably prompt in circulating those descriptions last night, and I may tell you that we, too, took a hand the instant the report reached us. Every police station within a radius of fifteen miles was stirred into extra activity. On the outskirts of London, between one and five o'clock in the morning, no man or woman passed along the main roads leading from the south who was not scrutinized most carefully; but the result was nil. The inventiveness of the lunatic who expended time, money, and thought in preparing this refuge—or, it may be, headquarters—did not stop short when he and his companions emerged from the tunnel. He had other cards up his sleeve, and, confound him, he may not play them now, as he is well aware that the whole country has been roused. Seen any reporters yet?"

"They are here in scores, of course, but Mr. MacDermott's foresight has kept them at a distance."

"There is a guard over the tunnel, no doubt?"

"Yes—three men."

"Send one to find the newspaper correspondents and tell them that I shall be ready for an interview at Dorking about noon. We must arrange, too, to give the photographers a show, on a strict understanding that no pictures of Miss Mainwaring or you yourself are published. If you spot any one snapping us, go for him at once, and tear the negative out of the camera."

This, thought Linton, sounded more like the real thing. Otherwise—always excepting Furneaux's lightning deduction of the presence of a snake in the dining room when Monica Jackson screamed in terror—these queer detectives spoke and acted strangely.

Next came another perplexity, however, when he saw how quickly they adjusted the gas masks. He was prepared to instruct them in the use of such safeguards, but they were ready before he was, as he had

to secure a small cage containing a pair of canaries.

The tunnel emerged in the middle of a thicket of briers. It had a trap door, which could be bolted only from beneath, and a flight of boarded steps led to a gallery walled and roofed by stout planks. Talking, of course, was difficult, but it was hardly needed. By counting paces they had barely reached the foundations of the outer offices of the house before further progress became impossible. Furneaux was right again—the passage had collapsed just where it became important.

Linton turned his torch upon the birds, which were hopping about in alarm, their tiny black eyes seeming to inquire why they were being treated in this fashion. He took off his mask.

"It is all right," he said. "These little fellows are susceptible to the slightest trace of gas in the air."

"So am I," said Furneaux, grabbing Winter by the shoulder. "Let us get out of this, quick!"

Some hint of instant danger in his voice led the others to draw back a hurried pace from the fall of earth in front. There was barely room for two to walk abreast, so Winter led, Furneaux followed, and Linton brought up the rear, though all three were close together.

"What is it now?" demanded the chief.

"The walls are much more solid here—to check the force of the explosion, perhaps—and a thin wire is stretched tightly across the floor at a height of two inches, not a yard short of the fall."

"Let me have a look," said Linton.

"That has a familiar sound."

Suiting the action to the word, he crept on again, and sank to his knees, while his companions bent over him. The combined glare of three torches showed clearly what Furneaux's alert sight had already detected. A fine, rusted wire passed between two upright battens on one side, while on the other side it ran from the mouth of a small iron pipe.

"In all likelihood we have just missed exploding a contact mine," said Linton. "This is the sort of thing Heinie used to plant under a *pickelhaube* or a pair of binoculars in an abandoned dugout. Once he used a cross marking the grave of a fallen Highlander. You must have it detonated, as it will be a constant menace."

"A pretty complete job these blighters

made of their arrangements," growled Winter. "Good Lord, what a grudge they must have against the police!"

"I would prefer to discuss the matter further in the open air," urged Furneaux. "This place is distinctly unhealthy. Where one of these infernal machines exists there may be others, and Heaven knows in what nooks and corners that girl is prowling!"

Linton rose so suddenly that he cannoned against Winter.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, "but Mr. Furneaux is absolutely right."

The chief was well aware that his aid was indulging in a sardonic grin. His own features had lost their good-humored aspect, for he was steeped in conjecture as to the motive underlying so many deadly preparations, made, apparently, before ever a crime was committed.

"Let us pause and consider," said Furneaux, when they stood under the blue sky once more. "On second thoughts, it is evident that if any wire connections existed in the garden, they must have been disturbed long since. Just to make sure, sergeant, you might bring Miss Mainwaring here. Tell her what we have found. It will save time."

Linton darted a sharp look at the little man before he hurried away. Was Furneaux befooling him?

"Now, listen to me, Charles," began Winter severely.

Furneaux's ivory-tinted face wrinkled with delight.

"Why shouldn't we introduce a touch of comic relief into our tragedy?" he cackled. "The cream of the joke is that you don't see it. The Hon. Peggy, only daughter of a peer, who is also a cabinet minister, regards Linton as an ordinary policeman, which vital drawback alone restrains her from flirting with him. Our smart young friend, Captain Arthur Mountstuart Linton, D.S.O., late machine gun officer of the East Kents, happens to be a nephew of the chief constable of a neighboring county; who is retiring next January after thirty-five years' service, and, in the meantime, is keeping the job warm for Master Arthur. As you know, county councils prefer to appoint men with actual police experience, so Linton, whom I regard as a first-rate youngster, is going through the mill in Surrey, and will be an acting superintendent before Christmas. The beauty of the present situation is that he believes Miss Peggy

to be a lady's maid, or something of the sort, in the Copmanthorpe household, so he is throttling his obvious admiration for her. Marriage with a girl in her position wouldn't do at all, at all, as they used to say in Cork when Ireland was lazy and happy. In the language of dramatic criticism, the situation is piquant. Pity it can't last more than a day or two!"

"Why should we allow these young people to occupy a false position?"

"False fiddlesticks! A police sergeant may marry a lady's maid!"

"But a peer's daughter would look higher than a county chief constable."

"So, why worry? The only person who has a kick coming is Lord Robert Ferris."

"Who the deuce is he?"

"A young spark in the Guards, deeply interested in the fair Peggy."

"Who told you that?"

"She did, after breakfast."

"You certainly are the limit! I don't know what the commissioner will say to all this if Lord Copmanthorpe cuts up rough."

"James, before we scotch this snake of ours, they will all be hanging on our slightest word."

"Possibly; but here come the two. Now, remember, no more matchmaking! Let events take their course."

"They always do," murmured Furneaux.

"Well, sergeant, have you duly alarmed Miss Mainwaring by a realistic description of the unexploded mine?"

"Well, yes."

"Not quite sure, eh?" Furneaux turned his smiling eyes on Peggy. "What has he been talking about?"

"He was rather anxious to learn how I managed to get away from Curzon Street so easily. I explained that my people are in Scotland, so all I had to do this morning was to exercise a Sealyham in the Park, which the second footman is now attending to quite satisfactorily, I hope."

Linton may have wondered why the other three should laugh, as if the girl had said something exceedingly funny. He was, of course, blissfully unaware of the adroitness with which, by being quite candid, she had maintained her rôle.

"Have you propounded any new startling theory during my absence?" he said, rather curtly, for the representatives of the Yard seemed ready to discuss any topic under the sun rather than the serious business of the moment.



"Have we?" inquired Furneaux, gazing at Winter.

"No," said the chief promptly. "Furneaux is itching to spring a surprise on us, but I quelled him until you returned. We are keeping nothing back from you, sergeant. We want you to share fully in this man hunt."

"Then may I venture to tell you first what Miss Mainwaring has discovered? She looked into a damaged rainwater barrel outside the garage—which, by the way, contains a Ford car—and found this."

Linton unfolded a wet rag which had been crumpled up in his right hand, and revealed the back part of the collar of a lady's cloth coat. The material was gray in color and smooth in texture. A bit of merino lining adhered to the cloth, which had been badly charred. Indeed, it appeared to have escaped total destruction only by being blown into water. The vital importance of the exhibit lay in the fact that a tab stitched between cloth and lining bore a name and address: "Maison Marnier, Rue Blanche, Paris," and a number, "17,008."

The detectives examined Peggy's find in silence.

"You're fortunate, Miss Mainwaring," said the chief at last. "We certainly did not err in bringing you here this morning. This may prove more than useful."

He wrote something on a leaf of his notebook, and called a policeman, instructing him to ring up a certain number in Whitehall, to ask for Inspector Sheldon, and to say that Mr. Winter wished him to telephone Paris for information concerning the tab.

"Go to the first house which has a telephone," the chief added. "You'll see the wire."

"Would you mind if he sends the message from Dorking police station?" broke in Furneaux.

"Not in the least."

"There won't be much delay, sir," said the constable. "I have a bicycle at the gate."

"You and I were really thinking of the same thing, chief," said Furneaux, seating himself beneath a tree, and tucking his knees within his arms. "As usual, you are material, I psychic. I know you loathe the word, but it is descriptive, and sufficiently vague. My line of reasoning is clear enough. Our opponents can hardly

have failed to learn, by this time, that none of the Dorking police suffered by the destruction of the house. They may even have found out that Monica Jackson was rescued. Therefore, they are anxious now to make sure that the mine in the tunnel has not failed. You seem to understand these fiendish contrivances, Sergeant Linton. Tell me, what is a simple method of detonation?"

"One might pay out a length of strong cord from a safe distance, attach it to the wire, and pull hard when all was clear."

"Splendid! If only we had the cord!"

Linton laughed, as he stooped over a folded mackintosh which had concealed the cage.

"Pardon this display of omniscience," he said; "but here it is. Allow me to explain that I intended it merely for measurements, if needed."

"Ah, you are young enough to afford to throw away opportunities! I, in your place, would have paralyzed my hearers by producing the cord in silence."

"We take that for granted," said Winter dryly. "What are you driving at? If you imagine I had in mind any such idiotic scheme—"

"You'll be sorry you said that, James," cackled Furneaux, in the high-pitched tone he adopted almost insensibly when thoroughly aroused. "What I meant by the allusion to your materialistic brain was that you thought of the neighboring houses as containing telephones, whereas I, using some sensitive mental equipment which God has given me, regarded them only as possible observation posts for the enemy. The same remark holds good of nearly every tree among the thousands on two hillsides. A scout posted anywhere within half a mile can easily follow our every action through binoculars or a telescope."

Winter lighted a cigar. Furneaux, with the reticence of a skilled actor, affected a humility which ignored his chief's failure to offer further criticism.

"Consequently, I suggest now that a great display be made of hunting around for spades and pickaxes. Something of the kind must exist in the outhouses."

"We have a supply in readiness," said Linton.

Furneaux eyed the sergeant with seeming disfavor.

"Young man," he chirped, "your prevision is almost uncanny. It might disturb

me if I had not seen those useful implements stacked in the front shrubbery. Have you a two-foot rule?"

"A six-foot rule."

"And a pocket compass?"

"Yes."

"Pray keep them. They are not necessary. I only want you to refrain from interruptions. As I was saying, we four, presuming we have been seen already, go down into the tunnel, accompanied by four strong-armed bobbies armed with trench tools. The policemen should remove their hats and tunics, leaving them out of sight in front of the house. Once we have descended the steps, we crawl out again. You will have noticed that the dry brake in which the trap door is situated is well screened by trees and undergrowth. If Miss Mainwaring does not object to risking some damage to her skirt and blouse, seven of us should be able to creep some thirty yards or so, unseen. If we lie flat, we ought to be fairly safe there, I take it?"

He paused. Winter looked at Linton, who remained silent.

"Our authority on mines does not dispute the statement," went on Furneaux glibly. "Sergeant Linton, meanwhile, who is unanimously elected to the post of honor, arranges his demonstration. When the explosion occurs, if it does occur, there ought to be plenty of smoke and dust to enable us—the whole eight, I trust—to gain the shelter of the trees in front of the house without detection. I see no reason why I should consider our next course of action. Before the rocket goes up, we must post on the main road, at a distance of a mile, or somewhat less, two strong and well-armed patrols, who will stop and inquire into the business and identity of any adult passing in either direction leading from this locality, being especially careful in their examination of cyclists and the like. Foreign servants, hurrying on their employers' affairs, should be detained without discrimination, and this instruction should hold good till"—he consulted a wrist watch—"say half past eleven, after which hour traffic will be allowed to flow freely once more. The patrols can almost disregard people hurrying this way. If the mine is sufficiently noisy, it will cause all the alarm and confusion the most exacting stage manager could ask for."

"Please, will there be any danger for—for any one?" inquired Peggy timidly.

"Sergeant Linton, an expert in such matters, assures us that the operation is simplicity itself."

At any other time, Furneaux would have chortled over the girl's anxiety and the embarrassed flush that tinted Linton's bronzed features with russet; but his eyes had met Winter's, and some occult message passed between the two.

"The plan is worth a trial," announced the chief suddenly, with the air of a man who had made up his mind to risk much on an uncertainty. "Let us get busy at once."

"One moment, sir," broke in Linton, and his voice had a curiously authoritative ring. "It must not be forgotten that the period of risk covers at least five seconds after the explosion. If it is a heavy one, balks of timber and large stones may be hurled over a periphery extending hundreds of feet, though I admit that the probable object of the mine is only to kill any one in the tunnel when it is fired. In any event, Miss Mainwaring must be protected. You must all lie flat on your faces, and remain there till I shout 'All clear!' The men should endeavor to shield Miss Mainwaring with their bodies. Choose a place under a large tree. I recommend that oak a little higher up. I'll not detonate the mine until you tell me you are ready."

"Don't be alarmed on Miss Mainwaring's account," cried Furneaux. "Fate is by way of being a humorist. If any one gets a rap on the head from a falling brick, it will be the author of this particular star turn."

Winter nodded, however, so Linton said no more. Indeed, he was silenced effectively by being requested to remain with the young lady whom he was so anxious to safeguard while the detectives carried through the preliminary arrangements.

"Didn't lose any time in taking command, did he?" snapped Furneaux under his breath, as he and the chief hurried away. "He wanted to bite old MacDermott's head off when he was ordered not to chase three or four armed criminals through a dark wood last night. Mac told me he stalked off like a haughty peer."

"Shut up, you imp! He's a plucky lad, and you know you love him for it."

"Shield her with our bodies, indeed!"

"Well, he couldn't possibly have meant you."

"Ah, you felt the barbed dart, too! Why not admit it? You are infernally

short-tempered this morning. You must have risen too early. You beefy fellows require plenty of sleep.

"Oh, magic sleep! Oh, comfortable bird That broodest o'er the troubled sea of the mind Till it is hushed and smooth.

"Of course, you don't read Keats. Who does, nowadays? Yet, he was a great poet, and he wrote those lines in the inn at Burford Bridge, which you see nestling in this delightful valley less than a mile away."

"Never have I known of any quotation being dragged in by the scruff of the neck more disgracefully," snorted Winter.

They were passing the two policemen guarding the tunnel, who heard all they were meant to hear of this conversation.

"Them's the swell 'tecs from the Yard," muttered one to his comrade.

"Well, if you hadn't tole me, I'd ha' thought they was a pair of lunatics, by their talk," said the other.

"If they are, it's a case of set a thief to catch a thief. The chaps who blew up this fine house for nothing must ha' been balmy, too."

"Who's the girl?"

"How do I know? She come down with them two. Our smart sergeant has made a hit in that quarter."

"Oh, Mr. Linton's all right. He don't look at no girls; an' he can keep his eyes shut at other times, as well. I was havin' a pint in the yard of the Black Bull the other evenin', an' me in uniform, too, when in comes his nibs an' another toff in a car. Of course, he was off duty, but he pretended he never saw a thing."

Nevertheless, the "smart sergeant" was deeply interested in Miss Margaret Mainwaring. The Yard was hardly out of ear-shot before he apologized for his abruptness over the phone the previous night.

"I could not help myself," he explained, with a frank smile which the Hon. Peggy regarded as uncommonly attractive. "You see, I am rather a novice in a big affair such as this promises to be, so I did not know how far I might be justified in telling you what had happened. In fact, I took a chance in ringing you up at all."

"Then you have not been a policeman very long?" said Peggy, hoping to make amends, even to her own conscience, for her overnight irritation by showing some degree of sympathy with his hopes of professional advancement.

"No—only about six months."

"Haven't you got on very rapidly?"

"Yes, I am fortunate in that."

"I suppose it's horribly wrong of me, but I do feel I want to be the first to tell you, if you don't know it already. You're to be made an inspector for what you did last night."

Evidently he was surprised.

"How can you possibly be sure of that?" he cried.

"Mr. Furneaux said it. Some one told him—a chief constable, I think. For goodness' sake don't let on I said a word about it. I believe he thinks well of me, and I should be sorry to lose his good opinion."

"But, if the authorities make me an inspector, what will they do for you? You are the person really responsible for discovering these scoundrels."

"Oh, Mr. Winter has as good as offered me work at headquarters already."

Linton reddened with vexation.

"I would have credited him with more sense," he growled. "A girl like you to get mixed up with the sordid affairs that the police have to deal with! Had it been that warped genius, Furneaux, I could have understood it; but a sensible fellow like Winter!"

"Pray don't be alarmed! I shall not accept any position in the Yard. Yet, if you don't care so much for police duties, why are you a policeman?"

"I cannot help myself; and this sort of thing is a man's job."

"The everlasting distinction of sex! I thought we women had won our proper places in the war!"

"Oh, you did—a thousand times over. You were wonderful, angelic. I cannot understand how any nurse or woman worker in a munition factory remains unmarried. The men at the front, who could best judge of their splendid qualities, were lost in admiration for them."

"Did you lose your heart to a nurse or a munition worker?"

He laughed at that.

"No," he admitted. "For one thing, I was not hit. For another, I have never, to my personal knowledge, set eyes on a factory girl. You, of course, were a flapper in those days."

"Is that an excuse, or a mere drawback?" asked Peggy.

"What? About you being a flapper?" He hesitated, and seemed to compel the



next words. "It was just an idle comment—a stupid *non sequitur*. Sorry! I mean—"

"I know what *non sequitur* means. 'Followers not allowed' in the kitchen."

"Somehow," he said, looking her straight in the eyes, in a rather troubled way, she thought, "I cannot picture you living in the servants' hall."

"Oh, I don't," she tittered. "I dwell much nearer the attic; but isn't it rather scandalous that we should be talking about ourselves? You ought to be sitting down and thinking hard. You have no idea how I bothered my poor little brain last night, after Monica was carried off."

Now a woman may break away willfully from a discussion which comes perilously near the border line of undisguised flirtation; but she is apt to be astonished, if not slightly annoyed, when the man follows suit. Linton discovered that Miss Mainwaring's sprightliness vanished as soon as he began to analyze the few actual facts of the mysterious incidents which had brought them there that day; so he, in turn, was puzzled and rather distressed.

Indeed, each was aware of a diffidence, a drawing apart, which contrasted oddly with the interest each had felt in the other only a few minutes earlier. There was a growing tension. They curbed both looks and words. It was almost a relief when the representatives of the C. I. D. returned with four coatless and hatless policemen carrying spades and pickaxes.

"Our apologies for the stage wait," cried Furneaux, after the first inquisitive glance. "Everything is in train now, however. In five minutes by the clock Dorking should be roused once more from the sleep of ages!"

## XII

"SACRÉ NOM D'UN NOM!" squeaked Furneaux, when the stricken air was still once more, and the last stone or clod of earth had fallen. "There were no half measures about those blighters!"

His excited comment was more than justified by the explosion that Sergeant Linton brought about when he jerked the cord attached to the suspicious wire in the tunnel. The sky seemed to be rended as by some stupendous levin bolt. The earth trembled. Houses shook in Dorking, a mile and a half distant, and windows rattled in Leatherhead, several miles away.

As for dust and smoke, they constituted a noonday pall that would have screened an army corps, let alone the few people who wished to get away unseen from the near neighborhood of the tunnel. Linton had warned his companions that it would be well if they stuffed a finger into each ear when he gave the premonitory signal. Of course, few obeyed, and, as a result, they were stunned into momentary silence—all except Furneaux, who would probably have something to say if he heard the last dread trump of the archangel proclaiming the day of judgment.

Linton was waving the others away from the direct path to the house, and they knew that he suspected the presence of gas. After a few yards of detour, however, he admitted that he might have been unnecessarily careful in this respect.

"I thought I knew the smell of most high explosives," he confided to Winter, "but this is a new one on me. It has a peculiarly disintegrating effect, too. I took a peep at the hole, and noticed that the wooden supports and roof of the tunnel were blown to splinters. Those fellows meant to make an end of any one who disturbed the wire. The mine was planted twenty feet, or more, nearer the exit."

"Which means, I suppose, that if we happened to escape the full force of the blast, we should now be buried alive," growled the chief, whose ordinarily cheerful aspect had yielded to a most determined frown. "Very well! There is nothing I like better than a fight to a finish, but I certainly would be grateful to any one who told me what all the row is about. Now, Miss Mainwaring, sit inside the car. Not feeling bad, I hope?"

"Rather breathless," said Peggy, with quite a valiant smile. "The bang reminded me of a bomb that fell close to our house during a daylight air raid."

"It had the same intent," broke in Furneaux. "Each was a blow meant for the heart of England."

He spoke so seriously that they all looked at him. Winter seemed to be about to utter some comment, but checked himself.

"I suggest that we should defer a detailed examination of the premises until after I have dealt with the press," he said. "I am at a loss to know what story to give them. The most plausible explanation of the existence of a fortified post in the middle of Surrey is that the place has been a



den of coiners, or counterfeit note printers, or both."

"The young men who represent the press nowadays are intelligent above the average," murmured Furneaux.

"Unfortunately we have to remember that the chief commissioner dislikes the broadcasting of sensational yarns by the police," growled Winter.

"Admitted; but, while avoiding the two-penny colored version, why not publish the penny plain one?"

"What? Beginning at Box Hill yesterday afternoon?"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, leave me out of it!" pleaded Peggy.

"We'll do that, for everybody's sake," said Furneaux instantly. "Nevertheless, it is hopeless to expect that we can prevent the newspapers from linking the attack on Foster with what has happened here. Some chatty cop must long since have blurted out a few of the striking facts connected with last night's doings. Just consider the position. Three policemen and one of Lord Copmanthorpe's servants are lying dangerously wounded as the outcome of a series of felonies, each obviously connected with the other. The whole countryside has twice been plunged into an uproar by terrific explosions. Look at the Dorking road now! As you would have said when in Artois, Sergeant Linton: 'The cloud of dust rising from the *pavé* reveals the passage of a large number of vehicles traveling at high speed.' I recommend, chief, that you leave word at the gate of your intention to keep the appointment already made for noon at police headquarters in the town. Then the newspaper men will hurry after you, and, meanwhile, you will have time to consider how far you can go in the way of hints as to the truth. The sooner we get Lord Copmanthorpe's name into this inquiry, the better."

"But why?" demanded Peggy, and her tone was so imperious that it surprised Linton.

"Because we ought to scare cabinet ministers, and others in high places, to take all necessary precautions for their own safety," came the prompt reply. "If the government can be persuaded that a really dangerous conspiracy against the state is in active existence, the less difficulty we, the guardians of law and order, shall have in devising and carrying out defensive measures. We are handicapped heavily

enough, as matters stand. It is a fixed principle of the British constitution that the police may be shot, stabbed, blown up, bludgeoned, or otherwise destroyed by enterprising criminals at all convenient times and places, but woe betide the unhappy detective or constable who shoots first! There is hardly a coroner in the land who would not be eager to commit him for trial on a charge of willful murder."

"Quite true," said Winter grimly. "Here comes the first newspaper car. Sit well back, Miss Mainwaring. Let no one see you clearly."

By this time they were at the gate. Winter assured the first flight of journalists that there would be no more sensational occurrences at the Avenue House—which, according to a resident in the locality, was the accepted name of the place.

With much difficulty, owing to the congested traffic, they passed slowly along the Dorking road. Near the Burford Bridge Hotel they were stopped by a police cyclist patrol, who informed them that a foreigner on a bicycle had been stopped and taken to headquarters.

"Did he say anything—make any protest?" inquired Winter.

"Yes, sir," answered the policeman. "He raised a regular row, making out that he was going into the town to telephone for seats at a theater."

"Did he tell you where he lives?"

"At the house over there, sir." The man pointed to a residence on the west side of the valley, whereas Avenue House stood on the eastern slope. "As a matter of fact, we spotted him riding down to the road, so we were ready for business when he came bowling along."

"Capital! Let the reporters pass, but keep a sharp eye on others until the time is up. If any one tries to bluff you, be sure and bring him or her along."

Linton, of course, was deeply interested in the words and actions of the two detectives. Hitherto, with few exceptions, he had regarded their utterances as verging on the fantastic, but now he was beginning to doubt his own sagacity. He would never have dared to plunge half a dozen parishes into an uproar by blowing up the mine. If, as a direct consequence, some accomplice of the actual criminals fell into one or both of the police traps on the high-road, in future he would blindly obey these queer representatives of the C. I. D.

"There's our catch!" exclaimed Winter, as the car slowed up on approaching the police headquarters.

Two motor bicycles and an ordinary pedal machine were balanced against the curb. One constable remained with them, and his right hand rested unobtrusively in a pocket. The other was shepherding a short, stockily built fellow into the police station.

"Ever seen him before?" said the chief, turning suddenly on Linton.

"No, sir—not to my knowledge," was the ready answer.

"Tell that cyclist constable not to give any attention to the man, if he comes out again. Take Miss Mainwaring to Superintendent MacDermott's house, and leave her there. Then return here, watch Mr. Furneaux from a distance, and be ready to help him if required."

As neither of the detectives had said a word bearing on any new project, the younger man was puzzled, but his training had taught him to carry out definite orders without question. Peggy, of course, acknowledged no such silent acceptance of the incomprehensible.

"What's going to happen now?" she said, in a half whisper, as her escort led her a little higher up the street.

Linton laughed.

"I've got to watch Furneaux," he said. "That should be quite exciting in itself."

"But, please, why shouldn't I watch Furneaux, too?"

"Because the O. C. says you're to make the acquaintance of Mrs. MacDermott, who is a dear, motherly old soul. Have no fear, Miss Mainwaring. You will hear everything at luncheon, if not sooner."

Linton himself began to have an inkling of coming events when Furneaux came and asked where the telephone exchange was situated. Meanwhile, Winter had met Superintendent MacDermott, and the prisoner—who might be better described, as yet, by the French word *détenu*—was brought into MacDermott's private office.

"Who are you?" began the chief, with an agreeable smile.

The man, evidently striving to cloak his alarm under an air of truculence, seemed to mistrust this friendly reception.

"Why am I arrest, in ze street, so?" he said, his gruffness of tone probably concealing agitation.

"You are not arrested. You have sim-

ply been asked to come here and explain why you were hurrying to the telephone."

"I go London dissa evenin', yes, an' I tell my Margherita—vat you say, my girl—go getta two seat at de *teatro*, an' one damn polisman pulla me offa my bicycle. Vat for?"

"I'm sure we are very sorry to have troubled you; but you have not yet told me your name."

"Pietro Ruffini."

"Ah! And what is your occupation?"

"I do ze work in ze garden for Mistaire Thistleton."

"At Holly Lodge?" put in MacDermott.

"Yes, sare."

"Italian?" said Winter suavely.

"*Sì—da Genova.*"

"How long have you been in Mr. Thistleton's service?"

"Seex mont'."

"Well, I must apologize for a mistake. We are all liable to that, you know. I suppose you know nothing about the people who lived in Avenue House?"

"No, sare."

"Very good! You may go. We have not kept you very many minutes from the telephone."

Ruffini looked rather bewildered, but hurried out at once. MacDermott, though perplexed for the moment, merely remarked that the fool might have saved himself some trouble by using Mr. Thistleton's phone.

"I guessed as much," grinned Winter. "It's all right. He's just the sort of sulky idiot who believes the British police can be humbugged easily, as he knows from past experience that he would have been handled quite differently in Italy. Now you and I are going to interview the press. I think the story ought to begin in Curzon Street at ten o'clock last night. The discovery of Monica Jackson's presence in Avenue House, soon after eleven, arose from the fact that the inmates were already under observation owing to certain suspicious circumstances, which cannot be gone into at the moment. Not a syllable about the half crown, Linton, and Miss Mainwaring! We account for the attack on Monica by our belief that a gang of international criminals is trying to bring about a social and political upheaval in England. They abducted a member of Lord Copmanthorpe's household in order to obtain information as to his lordship's movements during the next few days. Lawbreakers

are always interested in the Home Secretary. But, first of all, what have you learned of *mon vieux* and his associates?"

"The house agent says that a Frenchman, M. Jules Lefèvre, bought Avenue House nine months ago, posing as an enthusiastic amateur gardener. He paid cash for the place—four thousand pounds in Bank of England notes; and for that reason his references were never taken up. I have them here, and they seem to be first-rate—a bank and a firm of stockbrokers."

"We must let the reporters have the names."

"Yes—the publicity will draw either explanation or denial. The only letters ever delivered there were gas and electricity accounts, and demands for the rates, which were paid in cash by a housekeeper, who also did the marketing. The telephone was cut off, at M. Lefèvre's request."

"Ah!"

"Yes—that struck me as peculiar; but, of course, one sees now that the occupants were afraid of some one listening in."

"One word, and then we must face the reporters. You're an old hand at the game, Mac. Have you formed any sort of theory, no matter how far-fetched it may sound, which will account for these extraordinary doings?"

"I have never been so much at sea in all my years of police work," admitted MacDermott ruefully. "The ruin has not been entered, as I am aware of Furneaux's little fads in such matters, but I did peep in from the hall. The stairs have gone. In a big space beneath, where there may have been cellars, I saw some remnants of glass testing tubes and fused copper fittings. If such a thing were feasible, I would have suspected that the place had been used for distilling spirits."

"And why not?"

The older man smiled.

"You know better than I that the precautions against discovery were too elaborate and deadly for that simple explanation," he said.

"Yet it all depends on the sort of hell brew they were concocting," mused Winter aloud. "They say that there are factories in Germany to-day where a peeping stranger would probably meet with short shrift. Well, now for the newspapers and a national uproar!"

Knowing his men, Winter arranged to meet the journalists again at three o'clock

on the scene of operations. The evening papers were selling already in the streets of London and other towns, with big headlines. They contained brief reports describing the second explosion, and connecting it with prior events. Later editions would carry a fairly complete story. The morning newspapers would demand photographs, plus a midnight telephonic inquiry as to developments, if any, before going to press.

Winter trusted to luck, and to the confusion of the past half hour, that no local correspondent had heard as yet of the arrest of Pietro Ruffini. Therein his hope was justified. He had to answer many questions, but none as to the reason why a local Italian gardener should be suspected because he wished to take some unknown Margherita to a London theater that night.

MacDermott, well versed in the peculiar ways of his friends from Scotland Yard, was by no means as much surprised as he would have been otherwise when, at the conclusion of the conference with the newspaper men, he found in his office a stubborn and ugly-looking Ruffini. The man's hands were handcuffed behind his back. His face was bruised, and one eye was closing rapidly, not to open properly again for several days.

"Ah!" cried Winter cheerfully. "You fought, did you, my Italian friend?"

"The people in the telephone exchange saw something worth while," grinned Furneaux. "It was a hefty scrap, short but lively. Linton has gone to change his clothes, as his coat was badly torn, but he reports no other damages. I must say he tackles superbly. Must have played football in his time!"

"Anything urgent?"

"Well, yes. It all depends on whether Superintendent MacDermott decides to charge Signor Ruffini with complicity in the attempts to murder already committed or allows him to give away his associates."

"Nevaire! Nevaire!" shouted the prisoner savagely.

He could have bitten his tongue when he saw the detectives and MacDermott grin broadly.

"Just so!" chortled Furneaux. "Five minutes ago you were protesting that you did not understand why you should have been arrested twice, though you fought hard enough the second time, when you realized that you had been tricked. You

see," he went on, pretending to ignore his victim, "this imbecile made straight for the telephone office when released, and asked for a telephone number in Soho. Naturally, there was a little delay, as the local people had to be assured by authority that a complete stranger, who 'didn't look a bit like a policeman', as one of the girls put it, should be allowed to listen in. As a matter of fact, I myself put the call through. I tried to get the inspector at Vine Street on the job, but Pietro was becoming restive, so I had to take a chance and give him his number. I believe, but am not sure until inquiry is made, that a woman answering to the name of Margherita Dubois was waiting in some Soho restaurant for this call, and vanished at once after being summoned to the instrument. She gave her name when Pietro inquired, and he said, in Italian: 'Eleven fifteen. Apparently quite successful. Three men and a woman, who came in a car, and four others, who seemed to be policemen.' Why did you think those four were policemen, Pietro?"

The question was shot at the prisoner so suddenly that he started; but he recovered his wits quickly, and snarled an oath.

"The lady was fully satisfied with this information, and hung up," continued Furneaux. "As to what occurred during the next twenty seconds, Sergeant Linton will now enlighten us, as I hear his step."

There was a knock on the door.

"Come in!" shouted Superintendent MacDermott.

Linton entered. Furneaux had brought off one of the minor effects in which his soul delighted. MacDermott affected indifference, but the station sergeant, a burly fellow who had mounted guard over the Italian, looked flabbergasted. Neither they, nor even Winter, it must be confessed, had heard any one approaching. Indeed, they could hardly have been certain of the newcomer's identity had they been on the *qui vive* for his appearing.

"Tell the present company what happened after Ruffini came out from the telephone booth," said Furneaux, addressing Linton as if the latter had heard the whole conversation.

Linton, whose respect for the little man had grown by leaps and bounds since the discovery of the mine and its striking results, was ready now for any oddity of word

or action emanating from one whom he regarded as a veritable genius. He had changed into a blue serge suit, and Winter noticed, with approval, that he had selected a tie which matched it.

"I was looking in at the door," he said instantly, "and caught your signal, so I closed with Ruffini at once."

"Without speaking?" put in Winter.

"Yes, sir—it was advisable. When we got him down, we took an automatic from his breast pocket and a dagger from his belt."

"We?"

"Mr. Furneaux assisted me splendidly."

"How?"

"By grabbing his ankles and lifting his feet in the air. That put him completely out of action."

"A mere trifle, but mine own," chirped Furneaux.

"Did he resist?" went on Winter.

"Well, yes, he did. He tore my coat and waistcoat."

"Did you hit him?"

"No. He—er—acquired that black eye by having his face jammed against the floor."

"Capital! Sorry I missed the turn. How much did Dorking see of it?"

"Nothing. I closed the door as I entered, and the telephone attendants have promised to keep mum. Mr. Furneaux and I linked arms with him as we came here, and I don't think any one noticed us."

Winter eyed Ruffini reflectively for a few seconds. He was convinced that even if such a rascal offered to betray the gang to which he belonged, he could not be trusted. The man's calculating look was eloquent. No doubt he was already planning to befool the police.

"Put him in a cell," said the chief to the station sergeant. "If you approve, Mr. MacDermott, let him be charged, for the time being, with intent to commit a felony and carrying concealed weapons. You can deal with him later for other offenses."

"Before he goes, however," said Furneaux, "he may as well know that we understand exactly what a half crown marked with a number in Roman numerals means."

That Parthian shot told. The Italian's swarthy face paled. Nevertheless, an iron resolution—or, it may be, a greater fear than any engendered by the law—kept his tongue still; so he was taken off to a cell.

(To be continued in the March number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)



# N. Terwilliger Takes the Bumps

THE ROMANCE OF A RATHER UNUSUAL GIRL AND A VERY UNUSUAL YOUNG MAN

By Louise Kennedy Mabie

**I** HESITATE to introduce Mr. N. Terwilliger Lamb, for in these days your hero who "gets across" must be virile, large-chested, deep-hearted, and strong-lunged. If to these qualities it is possible to add curly black hair, an absence of gold teeth and a striking manner of beating up the trusting little blond lady who is just putting her timid foot to the path that leads to "stylish stouts," your magazine editor prints him without reading the last installment, and your motion picture director screens him in chunks.

Now Mr. N. Terwilliger Lamb was none of these things. He was pale-eyed, straw-colored, thin, and mild. He knew so little of trusting young blond ladies as really to admire them. His shoulders were slightly stooped, and he felt raw weather keenly. He would close up the windows of his shabby little tin car against sleet and wind and snow, and would sit among his brushes and beneath his thin overcoat and shiver and shake.

There's another thing. His job! We've postponed the inevitable for a paragraph, but it has been looming ahead. It must be lovely to dig up a hero with a manservant, and a bath, and monogrammed cigarettes given to him by Lady Clarissa Belchambers, and no job whatever. One could enjoy a hero who tamed lions in a circus or bears in Wall Street. It is understood that romance lurks only in the souls of violent, venturesome persons. Who ever heard of a romantic postman, for instance? Or of a forceful florist? Or of a captain of industry who sold brushes from door to door over a limited section of New Jersey? The

very State hampers us at the start, the very city, the very street.

"I'll say for him that he's neat," asserted Mr. Lamb's landlady thoughtfully, viewing him from the kitchen window, as he backed his battered car out of the garage in the chill blue light of a wintry morning. "He wears seven clean collars a week, and he darns his socks. He's got a little thimble to do it with. He's mannerly at table, too. He don't make a bit of a fuss with his soup."

"Can it, ma!" yawned Mabelle Virginia McCann, the landlady's blond daughter. "He's got about as much pep as a dead fish on ice!"

Meanwhile N. Terwilliger Lamb, making his calls from door to door, had to buck against the tempers of housewives made irritable by the snow in front of their residences, by the banked ashes in the kitchen range and the frozen tap in the garage, and by the fact that black Bertha had languidly phoned that she "didn't feel so busy today," and "wouldn't be along." Mr. Lamb, throughout the morning, raised his brown fedora at just the right angle, smiled enough and not too much, and boosted his brushes so enthusiastically that they overtopped by the necessary fraction of an inch all other brushes in the known world.

"Hearth brushes, floor brushes, window brushes, sink brushes!" chanted N. Terwilliger at each narrowly opened door. "A little higher in price, *but*—madam, if one of our little World Beaters should enter your home, it would work a revolution, it would insure hitherto unknown hours of ease, it would soothe, it would satisfy—"

"Uh-uh! Would it clean?" asked the lady whose one cold eye at the crack of the door was all of her personality N. Terwilliger could grasp at and hold.

"Would it clean?" said N. Terwilliger, discarding lyric patter to address a real prospect. "Say, our brushes have been recently installed in the public schools of this and the adjacent State. Madam, our brushes serve banks, city halls, jails, the mansions of the rich, the cottages of the more intelligent poor. They never shirk. They never stall. They never refuse. An outfit of World Beaters could clean up the State Legislature. All we need," he added, with a purposeful twinkle of his eye, and with the manner of one letting a friend in on a pleasantry, "is improved transportation in order to sweep the Milky Way!"

"Uh-uh!" slowly, consideringly. "Well, there was a fella here last week give away a sample—"

"Madam," said N. Terwilliger at this point, with the light touch of an artist on a finished composition, "we give away a sample, and we have also a special proposition on a deferred payment system on liberal terms."

At this point the crack of the door would widen—not invariably, but frequently—and the lady's gray sweater would stand revealed.

"Walk in," she would say—not invariably, but frequently. "I might need a good floor brush. I may as well see what yuh got."

After a particularly successful morning, N. Terwilliger would stop at Mary's for doughnuts and a cup of coffee, or sometimes, if his sales warranted extravagance, for the luxury of ham and eggs. To-day, lunching late at his usual table, and figuring on the corner of an envelope, he decided that he might be able to swing the thing in ten years. After a second cup of coffee, figuring forcibly, he brought the years down to eight and a half. They stretched before him on the envelope in a slow, bleak, toiling procession:

"Hearth brushes, floor brushes, window brushes, sink brushes! A little higher in price, madam—"

But ah, the glory at the end of the trail—the rose-covered bungalow, the orange trees, the sunshine that warmed, that healed, that blessed, the sunshine that didn't fail; and in the doorway—here N. Terwilliger caught his breath and almost covered his eyes—a

blond glory that was her hair, and warm breast that was to be his haven!

## II

"SAY, young fella, I'm sorry," said a big voice in N. Terwilliger's ear. "I'm darned sorry, but I couldn't help it."

As N. Terwilliger, still dazed from his dream, stared up dumbly, a huge hand gripped his shoulder and shook him gently.

"Bess," said the big voice, "you mountain cat, look at what your claws have raked up this time!"

Over the shoulder of a huge gentleman in raccoon peered the large, high-colored, jade-eared face of a lady in squirrel. Both looked down upon N. Terwilliger smilingly, pityingly, with a certain air of diffidence. They were sorry, darned sorry, for something, N. Terwilliger gathered, but they were also a little amused.

He cleared his throat, which felt raw this bleak day, and which had acquired a sudden lump.

"I—I don't understand," he quavered bravely.

"She picks 'em out," explained the raccoon gentleman agreeably. "She's got a system that can't fail. She eats 'em alive. She's smashed three of 'em coming up from Florida. We're touring the U. S., you understand—been on the road since last October. I'm from L. A., myself, and so's my wife. Shake hands with the wife, young fella, and let her tell you you ain't got any car."

"No car?" quavered N. Terwilliger. "But I have a car. I use it in my business. I left it just outside—"

"Young fella," said the big man deliberately, "your car has gone where the smashed cars go. It's honking its horn in paradise."

In the face of Mary's urgent placard—"Gents, don't smoke—ladies neither"—he drew from its case a long black cigar and lighted it judicially.

There fell a brief silence.

N. Terwilliger, wishing to rise in his galoshes because of the large lady's perfumed presence, wishing to rise in spirit and leap over this chasm bravely, heroically, found that he could do neither. He drew out his pocket handkerchief of near linen, and wiped his brow, his lips. Unobtrusively, apologetically, he blew his nose; but his hands trembled, his thin knees shook, and his teeth had begun a persistent little chat-

tering tune of their own. It was as if they had taken charge of the situation, and were trying, mistakenly but with the best intentions in the world, to set it to music.

Glancing up at the large lady in the fear that she might be hearing the uncontrollable teeth, he smiled at her wanly.

"It—it wasn't really a—a car," said N. Terwilliger gallantly. "No company would insure it. Don't—don't feel badly about it, madam. All that held it together was the paint."

"Now, papa, I call that sweet!" the large lady decided instantly. "D'y'e remember that raving lunatic in Richmond when all I did was crumple up his bumpers? And the guy in Albuquerque that squirted his fire extinguisher on us? Stacked against them hoodlums, papa, he's a gentleman. We buy him a whole car this afternoon, if I have to hock my emerald anklet!"

"Now, Bess," murmured the raccoon gentleman soothingly, "the osteopath that set your knee said not to get razzed—"

"Who wouldn't get razzed," broke in the high-colored lady indignantly, "over a poor little sweet mole like him losing the only car he's got, just because them million-dollar brakes of yours burned out on me? What's your name, deary?"

"Lamb," gulped the brush vendor—"N. Terwilliger Lamb."

"Lamb!" echoed the large couple, *duetto*, in amazement. "N. Terwilliger—why—say, any relation—"

"No," said N. Terwilliger sadly, shaking his aching head. "No relation of the N. Terwilliger Lamb—at least, no blood relation. My mother admired his achievements as a young man, and named me in the hope that—spiritually, I might—"

Here N. Terwilliger's voice sickened and died.

"Some namesake, young fella!" said the huge gentleman easily. "Some cliff for infant feet to climb!"

"Why, we're driving a Terwilliger Lamb landaulet ourselves," said the large lady. "We sank eight thousand berries in the body alone."

"The name," admitted N. Terwilliger, "frequently causes extreme surprise."

"Surprise!" echoed the large lady cheerfully. "It had me faded. For a minute I thought I'd horned in on the King o' Spain! Have ye finished your sandwich, deary?"

"I—I believe so," replied N. Terwilliger vaguely.

"Pay his check, papa," said the capable large lady. "We'll be outside lookin' at his car."

Outside, others were looking at his car—nurses with prams, high school girls in flapping arctics, small boys, matrons on their way to the movies—quite a little cluster stood about what had been N. Terwilliger's car. As the large lady pointed out, the brushes sticking out of the body reminded her for all the world of a hedgehog she had met last summer at Lake Louise.

"We're trotters, all right," she announced to an interested world. "We haven't slept in the same beds two nights running for months!"

The matrons edged nearer. The high school girls giggled. N. Terwilliger regarded his car. Bent, twisted, broken, utterly smashed, and behind it the landaulet, its splendor undimmed, arrogant, contemptuous, as superbly untouched by the futile wreck as a comet would be by a small parked cloud.

It was at the moment that N. Terwilliger was trying to open a jammed door that Mabelle Virginia McCann, free from her filing cabinet for an afternoon—Mabelle Virginia, blond and lustrous, wearing her new marmot coat and the strapped red Egyptian pumps—drew alongside and stopped.

"My gaudy necktie!" ejaculated Mabelle Virginia. "If it isn't Mr. Lamb!"

The matrons turned. The large lady turned. N. Terwilliger, trying to open the jammed door, stood for an instant as if struck by lightning before he also turned, looking considerably less pale than usual.

Not so long ago N. Terwilliger's conversational limit with Mabelle Virginia had been a shy "Er—good morning, Miss McCann. Er—well, is this cold enough for you?" But upon the third day of the second week, Mabelle Virginia, being two halves Irish, had rebelled.

"My gaudy necktie, Mr. Lamb!" she had said, exasperated. "Is it a clause in your contract with ma? Don't you know how to talk to a girl?"

"N-not to you," stammered N. Terwilliger, jammed by Mabelle Virginia's swoop into the very center of the truth.

"And why not to me? What's the matter with me?" she demanded, frowning across the table.

"N-nothing," said N. Terwilliger, gulping hot coffee. "That's the reason—"

"Here, pour in some milk. You're steaming like a locomotive. Take it easy. What's the reason?"

"When I start to talk to you—" began N. Terwilliger. "When I start—"

"Lay off the starter. Your engine's running."

"Something comes up in my throat and chokes me," gulped N. Terwilliger. "I think—it must be—my heart!"

For a long moment the girl's violet blue eyes met N. Terwilliger's pale ones across the checked tablecloth. At that moment Mabelle Virginia, who had always fancied dark gentlemen, whose favorite picture had been "The Sheik," and who had sworn never to ride permanently in anything less noteworthy than a Lamb landaulet, felt a perfectly normal pulse quicken curiously, and a glow that was not artificial spread across a cool cheek.

Elucidating to her girl friend afterward, Mabelle Virginia opined that it had been indigestion; but ever since that morning she had breakfasted late, and alone. It wasn't that she was really avoiding ma's Mr. Lamb, she told herself. It was only that the sight of his frayed but clean little collars and his suit of thin summer serge made her sick.

To-day, however, Mabelle stopped in spite of herself—stopped very short in her small red Egyptian tracks—stopped dead. Indeed, there is no proper term to express the suddenness, coupled with the finality, of her stopping.

"If it isn't Mr. Lamb!" said Mabelle Virginia once more, in an artificial little voice, while her eyes took in with one quick sweep the car, the large lady, the awakening, lifting, soaring look upon Mr. Lamb's face, and the whole situation.

"Friend of his, deary?" asked the large lady.

"Well, we're acquainted," admitted Mabelle Virginia. "Occasionally he cuts loose and mentions the weather."

"Oh, but now Miss McCann is being deliberately unkind!" said N. Terwilliger nervously. He raised his hat and replaced it. He pulled on a glove and pulled it off. "She quite understands me and my attempts at—at—but she prefers to appear perversely blind!"

"Perversely blind!" repeated Mabelle Virginia to the large lady. "Can you beat

it? He attended night school in his youth, and now he holds down a sofa at Harvard!"

"I think he's sweet," said the large lady, belligerently; "and so do you, deary," she added.

Mabelle Virginia's blue eyes narrowed frostily, haughtily, for a moment. Then, at something in the large lady's expanding, embracing, understanding smile, they widened and warmed.

"Friend of his?" asked Mabelle Virginia, in her turn.

"For life!" said the large lady. "What d'ye know? When I smashed his little bus he apologized for leaving it lying about in my way!"

"He would," said Mabelle Virginia. "Can you beat it?"

"You can't even tie it," said the large lady.

It must have been from this moment that these two understood each other; for, immediately linking arms, they ignored Mr. Lamb and chattered. The large lady proved to be Mrs. James E. Sugden to newspapers, shops, and strangers, but Bess to the girls in the lodge at home and other intimate friends. She was as full of plans as an egg is of meat. When Mr. James E. Sugden appeared, she introduced him.

"Papa, meet Miss McCann. Isn't she pretty? Look at her shoes! I'm going to get me a pair like them, only green. Miss McCann, this is my Eddie's papa. He looked better with his mustache. Eddie's nineteen. You ought to hear him on the saxophone. He can make a noise like anything from a canary to a zebra. Say, folks, what are we waiting for? Get busy and get in. We're all going together to buy little old sweetie here his little new car!"

So capable was the large lady, so generously, expansively smiling, so movingly forceful, so loud to listen to, so dazzling to look at, that N. Terwilliger, for one, was quite in a daze when, carrying his samples, he stepped into the landaulet. If anything had been needed to finish the work that the large lady had begun, Mabelle Virginia just next to him—Mabelle Virginia, blond and lustrous, leaning back quite at ease, her soft shoulder just brushing his own at the turns—

Well, N. Terwilliger, seated in the landaulet riding down Main Street, felt that even old N. Terwilliger himself, that huge dropsical sun hung high in the financial heavens, was a mere blinking penny rush-



light in comparison. Old N. Terwilliger himself, for once, could have nothing on his humble namesake.

### III

BUT the brush vendor's sensations, sailing down Main Street in the Lamb landaulet, were as nothing to his emotions as he rode home late after a dinner with the James E. Sugdens at the Alhambra—as he rode home late with his samples and Mabelle Virginia in his shining, gray-upholstered, new Fairy sedan.

The arc lights on the deserted corners hung frosty and blue. The streets ahead were long, dim lanes of white, cut by the black of the cleared car tracks into cubes on the stretches, into arabesques at the curves. Cars parked late before the picture palaces showed newly fallen snow on their roofs and running boards.

Outside N. Terwilliger's windows, the world ached and huddled and shivered away from the cold; but inside—ah! N. Terwilliger drew a deep breath and squared his shoulders. To outdo the young *Romeo*! To outshine the younger Barrymore! To fasten tin medals on the broad, heaving chests of the beautiful Rudies, the thrilling De Roches! To surpass all the great lovers of history! This was N. Terwilliger's reaction to the rising storm within.

The storm was fierce. It was violent. N. Terwilliger's thin frame trembled so beneath it that Mabelle Virginia, noticing, and thinking he must be cold, threw the new rug over his knees; and the tragedy of life for N. Terwilliger lay in the fact that he could not undeceive her. Cold, with this lamp in his breast? Cold, with this fire in his brain? Why, for the first time in his life N. Terwilliger was competing with a first-class, honest-to-goodness hero, storming the stars, riding the oceans of love, driving home with the girl, blond, lustrous, occasionally kind, whose little red Egyptian shoes, dancing across his heart, had left tracks thereon that would last forever!

Together they locked the shining new wonder away for the night in Mrs. McCann's old barn. Together they trod softly through the kitchen, and paused in the dimly lighted hall.

"In eight years and a half, Miss McCann," said N. Terwilliger deliberately, desperately, "I'm going to have an orange grove in California—and a wife," he added firmly, as an afterthought.

"My godfather, Mr. Lamb!" murmured Mabelle Virginia. "How sudden!"

"I've got four hundred and seventeen dollars toward it now," said N. Terwilliger earnestly, impressively. "All I need to swing it is two thousand. I wouldn't ask any girl to—to wait for eight years and a half, you understand. It wouldn't be fair to her; but I thought I'd just mention it."

"It pays to advertise," murmured Mabelle Virginia demurely.

"And if my dustless duster catches on," N. Terwilliger swept along recklessly, spurred by her eyelashes, by her sweetness, by her silence, into flights he had never dreamed of taking, "the time might be considerably shortened. I believe I've never shown you my dustless duster, Miss McCann?"

"No," said Mabelle Virginia.

"It looks like a gray muffler," exclaimed N. Terwilliger eagerly, unfolding an object from his breast pocket; "but it isn't a gray muffler. It smells like pine needles or eucalyptus; but, needless to say, it is neither. The smell is our secret, Miss McCann—big Charlie Hooley's and mine. The smell does the trick. The smell got us our patent. We have spent our evenings for six months, Miss McCann, evolving the dustless duster from the gray matter in our heads."

"That accounts for the foolish color," murmured Mabelle Virginia.

"Not at all!" said N. Terwilliger earnestly. "Our dustless dusters, boxed for market, can be made to match any room, any taste, any color scheme—"

"White for the brides," suggested Mabelle Virginia. "Black for the widows, and striped for the poor wives."

N. Terwilliger glanced up quickly, a hurt look in his pale eyes.

"I'm boring you," he said quietly.

He began to fold up the gray object slowly; but Mabelle Virginia laid a quick hand on his arm.

"Listen, Mr. Lamb," she said. "I've laughed over you, and I've cried over you, but from the day you came to the house, and there was that sly Tippie on the downy at the foot of your bed, and when Tippie scratched you, you said you sure liked cats and wasn't she beautiful—"

Mabelle Virginia paused, and drew a deeper breath than usual.

"You don't get bored, Mr. Lamb, by some one different from any one else in the

world, by some one you don't know beforehand just what he'll say and do and think—just how he'll eat his orange, and whether he'll wipe his feet on the mat or track in mud for ma, and the kind of ties he'll wear, and the way he'll make love to you—for they all make love to you—”

Here N. Terwilliger's eyes came up to hers quickly, searchingly, and held her quiet for a moment.

“You've—you've never bored me, Mr. Lamb,” she added after a moment—lamely enough, for Mabelle Virginia.

“Thank you, Miss McCann,” said N. Terwilliger breathlessly. “I never hoped for as much!”

And then, because he was just N. Terwilliger, and not a beautiful Rudie or a thrilling De Roche, because he was shy and inarticulate and desperately in love, because he was so chivalrous that he couldn't dream of taking advantage of her occasional heavenly kindness, he shook hands with her gravely, stiffly, as he might have shaken hands with the minister, and wished her a hasty good night.

Mounting to his third floor room, N. Terwilliger waded through golden clouds. And Mabelle Virginia? Well, Mabelle Virginia eyed herself in the glass as she brushed out her hair. Blond, lustrous, quite beautiful in her kimono of scarlet silk, she measured herself carefully against her own very high standard, and was not dismayed.

Then her eyes dropped to a gray object on her dressing table, which N. Terwilliger, in his haste, had left in her hand. It was the dustless duster, and even in the flatness of that moment she smiled a little.

“Striped for the poor wives!” she thought, as she drifted off to sleep. “Dusting, washing dishes, mopping, kissing the kids when they bark their dirty little knees, painting the porch furniture, fighting the bills, wearing a boudoir cap to market, forgetting your complexion and your hands and your teeth and your brains, too tired to eat or laugh or love—my grandfather's clock, strike out! Good night, nurse! They can head my obituary ‘Mabelle McCann, the Filing Cabinet's Bride!’”

#### IV

MABELLE VIRGINIA was leaning over a newspaper spread upon the scrubbed table as N. Terwilliger came through the kitchen next evening. When N. Terwilliger, rub-

bing his numbed hands together, sat down near the sink to remove his wet galoshes, she looked at him for a brief moment in silence.

“You're in the evening paper,” she announced at length. “You're spread across a whole page like a sunset.”

“Oh, that will be the other Terwilliger Lamb,” said N. Terwilliger easily, busy at his unbuckling. “He's said to spend three millions a year in advertising. It's—it's great,” the little man added humbly, “to have the same name as a celebrity like that, to come even a little under the shadow of his mantle. It's—it's an incentive to a chap to be named after a colossal success like that. And he's a fine man, too. He gave fifty thousand dollars, a while ago, to find a cure for hay fever.”

“A friend of mine,” said Mabelle Virginia steadily, “who worked in his Newark branch, said the old man was a first-class grouch. My friend said he could freeze the most liquid sales manager to a perfect solid just by walking into his office. My friend said that for the glad hand the old man didn't have, he was the humming bird's breeches!”

“Indeed!” said N. Terwilliger mildly. “That's odd! I can hardly credit that. He was so kind to my mother.”

“How do you mean, kind?”

“Well, he sent her a fine letter when she wrote that she had named the baby after him—I,” explained N. Terwilliger unnecessarily, “being the baby. He said he appreciated the compliment.”

“Did he send along a silver mug or anything engraved ‘Welcome, little Lamb?’” asked Mabelle Virginia. “Did he make a noise like a check?”

“No,” said N. Terwilliger. “No, he didn't do that. Why should he? But it was a very fine letter. I have it in my trunk upstairs.”

“Great snakes, Mr. Lamb!” ejaculated Mabelle Virginia in exasperation. “Haven't you got any fight in you?”

“Fight, Miss McCann? Why do you wish me to fight? What is there to fight?”

“Life,” said Mabelle Virginia cryptically. “Come over here!”

N. Terwilliger, dazed but obedient, unwound his knitted muffler, got up from his chair, and came. Together they bent over the newspaper spread across Mrs. McCann's kitchen table. Together they read the advertisement which shrieked up at

them in huge colored letters, covering the newspaper page like a sunset indeed:

**N. TERWILLIGER LAMB TAKES THE  
BUMPS IN A FAIRY SEDAN**

And then, in small type, in one corner:

Fairy Automobile Company, South Main Street

The smart young Fairy salesman and the smarter young Fairy advertising man, putting their heads together to make a killing, had had the art and the acumen to shoot straight enough for a bull's-eye, and then had put four satisfied feet up on the same desk and called it a day.

When N. Terwilliger finally raised his head to look at Mabelle Virginia, he was quite pale.

"It's me!" he said breathlessly. "It isn't the famous N. Terwilliger Lamb at all—it's me!"

"It's you, all right," agreed Mabelle Virginia, watching him with a flinty eye.

"But, Miss McCann," said N. Terwilliger in great distress, "this is terrible! It's taking advantage. It's using another man's name!"

"It's using your name," said Mabelle Virginia flintily.

"Oh, yes, of course; but don't you see"—N. Terwilliger threw out his hands—"it's sailing under false colors. It's deceiving the public into thinking that the other Terwilliger Lamb—the real Terwilliger Lamb—"

"It's a darned smart ad," said Mabelle Virginia watchfully. "And it's quite legal."

"Legal!" cried N. Terwilliger. "Who cares whether it's legal? It's not ethical, I tell you. It's not—honest. It's something I can't lie down under, Miss McCann. I'd as soon steal another man's sandwich as his name!"

"You keep forgetting it's your name," said Mabelle Virginia patiently. "You're not getting anything out of it."

"I'm going to get something out of it," said N. Terwilliger suddenly, somberly, "before the evening's over!"

"What?" asked Mabelle Virginia.

"Satisfaction," said N. Terwilliger thirstily; and, striking himself upon his narrow chest, he added: "Rehabilitation."

Secretly N. Terwilliger was romantic, but he had never dared; and now something fair and shining, which had been prisoned

within him, burst its bonds in the surge of Mabelle Virginia's inspiration, beneath Mabelle Virginia's eyes. N. Terwilliger, for the moment, was transformed.

He wound his muffler about his delicate throat, and, walking over to the chair beside the sink, began to put on his galoshes.

"Without your dinner?" asked Mabelle Virginia.

"What's dinner?" said N. Terwilliger with a reckless air.

Quite transformed! If Tippie had rolled up in the red chair as Tippie, and had unrolled as a striped tigress, Mabelle Virginia could not have been more astonished. There was purpose to the way he buckled his galoshes. There was pep to his stamping about in them after they were buckled. There was an air to the way he swung into his old overcoat. When he put on his hat, it had a cock to it.

"Wait!" said Mabelle Virginia, without conscious volition of her own. "I'm coming along; but where—who—what are you going to fight, Mr. Lamb?"

"Life!" said N. Terwilliger.

As he went out, he slammed the door behind him.

V

THE Fairy salesroom on South Main Street was closed when they drew up before its plate glass expanse, but a light was still shining in a rear office, and presently, in answer to N. Terwilliger's persistent knocking, a head with a cigarette protruding from a corner of its mouth appeared around a rear door. And as N. Terwilliger continued to knock, to pound, to gesticulate through the glass, the owner of the head steered a leisurely course across the tiled floor and opened the door.

"What's the idea, Paul Revere?" said the owner of the head. "Have the British marched?"

"I'm N. Terwilliger Lamb. You've exploited me in your beastly ad!" panted N. Terwilliger, unfastening his coat with trembling fingers, unwinding his muffler. "You've used my name to deceive the public. You've tried to pass me off as the real Terwilliger Lamb. I'm not the real Terwilliger Lamb!" panted N. Terwilliger, taking off the hat which had had a cock to it, and tossing it into a corner. "I resent being placed in the false, in the dishonest position of seeming to be what I'm not. What," demanded N. Terwilliger,

"would the real Terwilliger Lamb think if he came to hear of it?"

"What, indeed?" said the owner of the head blandly. Then, grinning over his shoulder toward the rear office, he called: "Say, boys, come out and see the only bird in captivity who objects to free advertising! He's here with his keeper!"

Still grinning broadly, he turned back, to consider N. Terwilliger amiably once more.

At that instant N. Terwilliger's arm shot out, and N. Terwilliger's fist caught the owner of the head at a particularly sensitive point upon his undefended jaw. Through the little mêlée that followed, the owner of the head rested quietly upon the tiled floor, stretched full length beside a shining new gray-upholstered Fairy sedan.

Two other surprised young men, issuing at a run from the rear office, immediately engaged N. Terwilliger. After one of them had received a cut on his lip, and the other a wild punch in the left eye from N. Terwilliger, and after both young men had taken considerable punishment in the way of kicks and bumps and jerks from a suddenly fired and frenzied Mabelle Virginia, N. Terwilliger, too, was stretched prone upon the immaculate tiling, and the little party stopped to breathe and consider the situation.

The first young man, owner of the head, who was the Fairy local sales manager, was all for the police when he sat up and joined them. It was evident that the first young man was seriously annoyed.

"He gets a new car given him by a perfect stranger, and a whale of an ad on a silver salver, and he howls for blood," complained the owner of the head, which was aching badly. "He's the kind of a guy that would poison a blind beggar's dog. He'd stage a steeplechase on a department store escalator. He'd set fire to an aquarium. He's a mischievous lad—that's what he is!"

"He's crazy," said the second young man, who was the Fairy local advertising manager.

"He's worse—he's honest," said the third young man:

Jeers met this announcement, but the third young man, who happened to be the local representative of a big New York daily, held up an impressive hand.

"Tarry a while," said he. "Use brakes and brains. We may get kudos out of this.

We'll ship him east of Suez in charge of Miss Dempsey here, and then we'll dope out a front page spread for the morning edition that will beat any ad. Moreover, it 'll happen to be true. 'N. Terwilliger Lamb Wrecks Fairy Salesroom and Breaks Collar Bone.' Zowie! That story 'll scream like an eagle. Now, Miss Dempsey, if you please!"

"McCann," corrected Mabelle Virginia distinctly.

"My mistake," said the third young man. "Take his head, Bob, and I'll manage the galoshes. Limp, ain't he? Can you run a Fairy, Miss Dempsey?"

"McCann," said Mabelle Virginia. "I can run anything."

"I'll say, sister," agreed the third young man. "I'll say. Prop him up with the rug, Bob, and bring his hat. Not a cop stirring! In you go, Miss Dempsey. Say, buy a New York *Record* in the morning. You will figure as 'the beautiful blonde.' My admiration, Miss Dempsey, though controlled, is keen!"

"McCann," said Mabelle Virginia. "Your eye, Mr. Whoosiz, though keen, is not controlled. It's got a puff over it like a tea cozy; and the other gent's lip 'll have to be explained to his wife. I certainly feel sorry for any three bruisers that try to pick on Mr. Lamb!"

"Our shins, Miss Dempsey, register your sorrow. Now, all set, Gladys? Comfortable? Warm? Happy? On your way, then, sweetness!"

## VI

AND so it happened that upon three succeeding mornings Leonidas Pulsifer, secretary in chief to the N. Terwilliger Lamb, laid upon his chief's mahogany writing table, in direct line with his chief's vision, a newspaper which the old man was not in the habit of reading.

It may be stated here that old N. Terwilliger's first requisite from each unit in his trio of secretaries was an absence of noise—the ability to move into and about and out of his room delicately, the ability to take orders and execute them without words, the ability to sit without jiggling and to say nothing. Beyond efficiency, before ability, above address or appearance or brains or an English accent, old N. Terwilliger demanded the quiet about him which approaches peace.

"I have a weak stomach and large, sen-



sitive ears," old N. Terwilliger once explained in a moment of expansion, after a particularly thundering deal to Leonidas Pulsifer. "Perhaps you've noticed them."

Pulsifer, by a bow, signified that the ears, like everything else about N. Terwilliger, were noteworthy.

"This is the age of jangle and yap," continued old N. Terwilliger. "It's the age of grab, holler, and git. The less I hear of it, the better. It's the age of get your feet in the other fellow's trough, and shout to the stars that you've done him at last. The less I see of it, the better. I dislike the human race. I dislike hogs. The fewer people I see, the fewer hogs I see, the better."

Pulsifer, suppressing a polite shudder, murmured that it was strongly put.

"You're a saphead, Pulsifer," said old N. Terwilliger brutally; "but you're honest—at least, you're measurably honest. I don't say you wouldn't sell me out for a hundred thousand. That would be about your price, Pulsifer. Money'll buy anybody and anything in this world but health and happiness. Now get out, Pulsifer, and don't wear that waistcoat again in my office. It makes my ears ache."

So Pulsifer, with his three newspapers upon his three successive mornings, laid them before the old man in silence.

The first morning the old man grinned.

"Me in a Fairy sedan?" said he. "I'd sooner be seen in a hearse, Pulsifer. Why can't the Fairy crowd let me rest in peace?"

Upon the second morning the old man grunted.

"The New York *Record*, Pulsifer—that yellow rag?" he said mildly, running his eye over the headlines. "'N. Terwilliger Lamb Wrecks—' Say, did I wreck a Jersey sales-room and break my collar bone with a beautiful blonde last night, Pulsifer? I thought I was at home, with my feet in a mustard bath. Don't waste my time with any more *Records*, Pulsifer. They make my ears ache."

Upon the third morning, the old man sat before Pulsifer's third newspaper a long time in frowning silence, for it was a newspaper which even old N. Terwilliger was bound to respect. A sob sister from the respectable newspaper had visited Mrs. McCann's; and the sob sister's article was headed, "N. Terwilliger Lamb, Idealist."

"Hell, Pulsifer!" said old N. Terwilliger, at last. "This chap is either a crook or a

genius at advertising. The thing had better be stopped. Phone Mr. Janes to be here at five. We're driving to Jersey."

And so it happened that when Mabelle Virginia let herself in with her latchkey at six that evening, and walked into the deserted parlor, the parlor was not deserted, for Tippie, somnolent, occupied the red armchair and an old gentleman, alert, occupied the green one. Mabelle Virginia took in the rocky, protruding chin, the beetling promontory of a nose, the little eyes like warning signals that squinted and gleamed beneath twin bushes of gray eyebrow. Mabelle Virginia noted the large, significant ears, as she drew off her white woolen gloves.

"Good evening, Mr. Lamb," she said, throwing her gloves on the golden oak table.

"Good evening, Miss McCann," said old N. Terwilliger.

Mabelle Virginia dropped her new marmot coat on the sofa and pulled off her close little hat. Then she lifted Tippie, somnolent, from the red armchair, sat down in it herself, and settled Tippie upon her lap. Throughout the little conversation that followed, Mabelle Virginia stroked Tippie softly, and the old gentleman watched Mabelle Virginia.

It was old N. Terwilliger's invariable policy to let the other fellow begin, especially if the other fellow happened to be a woman. So, after a little pause, Mabelle Virginia spoke.

"Are you waiting to see N. Terwilliger?" she asked politely.

"No—I have been waiting to see you," said the old gentleman. "First," he added.

She glanced up quickly, and then glanced down, stroking Tippie softly, evenly.

"Well, go ahead," she said presently.

"This is your move."

"Very well, Miss McCann, I move," said old N. Terwilliger. "What's the game? The readers of two newspapers are led to believe that I ride about in a tin car and wreck automobile salesmen. The readers of a third newspaper are led to believe that I'm an ogre who turns a deserving young relative out into the snow. Now you know and I know that I have no deserving young relative. What's the game?"

Mabelle Virginia stroked Tippie softly. "It's not a game at all," she said thoughtfully, "unless you call being kind and unselfish and honorable a game."

"I call being those things a very deep

game indeed, Miss McCann," said old N. Terwilliger.

"That's hard on you," said Mabelle Virginia, "if you see things on a slant like that, if you see life crooked and out of proportion. If you squint and peer and sniff at folks like that, Mr. Lamb, I'm afraid you won't get N. Terwilliger at all. It took me some time to get him myself, Mr. Lamb, and I'm not so fed up with nervous prosperity that I've got mental indigestion—like you have," added Mabelle Virginia.

The old gentleman said nothing. His little red eyes winked and gleamed, but he said nothing. It was his invariable policy to let the other fellow, once well started, proceed without interruption, especially if the other fellow happened to be a woman.

"You see it happened like this, Mr. Lamb," continued Mabelle Virginia presently. "You've heard of links in a chain, each one depending on the other, each one following the other. Well, this chain started twenty-three years ago, Mr. Lamb, when a poor woman who never had any chiffon stockings or embroidered sheets or theater tickets or American Beauties, who never even had enough coal or oatmeal or real butter on her bread, a woman who had a sick husband that died and a sick baby that lived—well, this woman named her sick baby after you, thinking—"

"Thinking she might get money. An old dodge!" snapped N. Terwilliger.

"Perhaps," said Mabelle Virginia. "Who knows? Hoping a little, maybe. Who wouldn't? 'Here's a man who's come down from the Lambs of old Kent, like the boy here,' she thought; 'a man that's got everything in the world I want the boy to have, that's got it by himself by brains and push and straight dealing, like I want the boy to do.' So she cut your picture out of a magazine, Mr. Lamb, and hung it on the wall; and you wrote her a letter 'appreciating the compliment.'"

Mabelle Virginia paused, stroking Tippie softly, evenly, between the cat's somnolent ears.

"After a while the woman died, and the boy went into a home, and came out of the home; but here's the point, Mr. Lamb—there was something in that boy that couldn't be killed, even by the home. I ain't very good at long words, but I guess we can call it faith—faith in the old things—unselfishness, truth, honesty."

Once more she paused, swallowing away a little dryness in her throat, stroking Tippie softly.

"He got a job selling brushes, and he made good," continued Mabelle Virginia, after a moment. "He came to live with us, and he made good with ma and Tippie here. And after a long time"—Mabelle Virginia hesitated—"after a long time he made good with—with me, Mr. Lamb. There's something about him that makes you want to feed him, Mr. Lamb, that makes you want to—give him things. Some nice roughnecks busted his little boat, and they give him a new one, and a dinner at the Alhambra afterward. Then the Fairy people saw a chance to be smart, and to sell the public into thinking it was you, or at least into getting people to read the ad and grin; and N. Terwilliger went off his nut and plowed down there and fought the bunch—protecting your name, Mr. Lamb, from himself. And so they used him again in the *Record*. And a woman reporter got to him when I was away—he didn't really break his collar bone, but he had to lay off a couple of days—and he showed her your letter, the one he keeps so careful in his trunk upstairs, Mr. Lamb—the one 'appreciating the compliment'—and she printed it."

Her hand dropped down hard upon Tippie's soft back. Tippie stirred, opening one somnolent eye.

"But the whole point is, Mr. Lamb, that he showed her the letter because he's so proud of it, coming from you. He never felt any—lack in it. He admires you, Mr. Lamb, more than anybody. He keeps on telling how fine you are. He's got his faith in folks built on you, Mr. Lamb, like a sort of corner stone, like a sort of flag."

Here Mabelle Virginia, feeling in one of her blue serge pockets, brought forth a gray object, with which she dabbed at her eyes. Mabelle Virginia wasn't crying, you understand, but her eyes were wet.

"And I just can't bear it, Mr. Lamb, if you let him down when you meet him. I suppose you came out here to arrest us both, or something. I saw the sheriff in your car outside. If you do that, Mr. Lamb, you'll kill him as sure as if you had turned him out into the snow, like that reporter said. He couldn't stand it, Mr. Lamb—the disgrace would kill him. He's got a delicate throat. He's—saving up—for—California—"

Mabelle Virginia, trembling, stooping, buried her wet face in Tippie's soft back, and for a space there was silence in Mrs. McCann's parlor.

It was during this silence that N. Terwilliger burst in from the kitchen.

"Mabelle Virginia!" N. Terwilliger was calling excitedly, as he came through the hall. "Mabelle Virginia, your mother says Mr. Lamb's here! Your mother says Mr. Lamb—Mr. Lamb—"

Even though he was thus prepared, N. Terwilliger's voice died quite away at the sight of the old gentleman sitting in the green armchair; but there was an awakening, lifting, soaring look upon his face as he crossed the room and held out his hand.

"This gives me the greatest pleasure, sir," he managed jerkily, "the greatest pleasure—so far—of my life!"

The old gentleman regarded the outstretched hand, squinted up under his shaggy brows at the eager young face, and squinted across at Mabelle Virginia. Then the old gentleman did a curious thing. He got up from the green armchair, and, looking straight at N. Terwilliger, he raised his hand in a little gesture of salute.

"My boy," he said gallantly, "the pleasure is belated, but mutual. It's time I met any deserving young namesake of mine who happens to be lying around loose. What say," added old N. Terwilliger, "what say to chucking Lawyer Janes and the car and the chauffeur out there, and us three getting

into your Fairy and driving down for a little dinner at the Alhambra—us three? What say?"

## VII

THE arc lights on the deserted corners hung frosty and blue. The streets ahead were long, dim lanes of white cut by the black of the cleared car tracks into cubes on the stretches, into arabesques at the curves. Cars parked late before the picture palaces showed newly fallen snow on their roofs and running boards. Outside N. Terwilliger's windows the world ached and huddled and shivered away from the cold, but inside—ah!

N. Terwilliger drew a deep breath and squared his shoulders. As he moved, Mabelle Virginia lifted her head.

"Rose-colored for the happy wives," said Mabelle Virginia. "There's something in luck. He wouldn't have seen our duster at all, hon, if I hadn't cried into it. Think of our dusters, hon, being good enough for the Terwilliger Lamb cars! But there was a whole lot more than dumb luck made him give you their advertising for southern California."

N. Terwilliger, driving with one hand on the wheel, looking ahead with one eye on the road, put his other hand under Mabelle Virginia's round chin and lifted her lips to his.

"What more, darling Mabelle Virginia?" asked N. Terwilliger.

"You!" said Mabelle Virginia.

## THE SUNDIAL

TIME in a garden,  
Just around the corner,  
Right around the corner of the world.  
Summer on the *patio*;  
Mignonette and golden-glow,  
And quiet, like a cameo.

Time in a garden!  
Baby feet are running,  
Baby fingers cover up the leaves;  
Where the jasmine vines are veiling,  
Where the yellow rose is trailing,  
Love is lord and all-prevailing!

You who ride on the busy street,  
Is life more laughing or youth more sweet  
Than sunlight in a garden,  
Just around the corner,  
Right around the corner of the world?

Mary Louise Mable

# Collaborators

A NOVELIST AND HIS WIFE EVOLVE A HERO AND A HEROINE,  
WITH UNEXPECTED RESULTS

By Edward M. Thierry

MATTHEW OGG'S new wife shot him a peevish look. The domestic barometer registered an immediate forecast of "cloudy and warmer." An early morning spat was following hard upon the breakfast eggs, and it looked like a long, hot, hostile day.

Time was when Mrs. Ogg, becoming annoyed with the obstinate Ogg, resolutely bridled her tongue, and didn't even dream of casting him an angry glance; but that was when she was plain Sophie Mead, spinster secretary to Matthew Ogg, popular novelist. Then she spoke softly, if at all. She kept her nimble fingers dancing over the typewriter keys, and her thoughts over the vista of what she could do and would do to put a little vim and vigor into the best-seller at the moment under incubation—if her employer would let her.

When Miss Mead was hot under the collar, she always concealed it. She was getting on—thirty-five, confidentially. She had the wisdom of years. In her typewriting days, she wisely stuck strictly to the job of typewriting. She did not obtrude herself. She just let herself grow on the middle-aged author, like the slow, unnoticed growth of a habit—a sort of automatic insinuation of personality which, after some years, had its reward. She was indispensable.

So Sophie Mead, secretary, had become Mrs. Ogg, wife. Her new life had begun two months ago.

Her station now even transcended that of wife. Years of dreaming over the typewriter, when Ogg wrestled with a balky plot and slowed up in dictation, were at last to bear fruit. She had been promoted from secretary to wife, from amanuensis to collaborator.

Ogg, in a weak moment of his courtship,

during which time he unromantically talked shop, had promised that his dear Sophie should join with him in writing his next novel.

"My dear," he had said, "you have helped me so wonderfully in your sweet, quiet way. You have guided me over many a pitfall with a common-sense suggestion. We will collaborate!"

"Oh, Matthew! My dream's come true!"

In a sketchy, conversational way they had planned the next novel. It was to be a typical Ogg romance—the kind that chained thousands of thrilled women to easy chairs all afternoon, increased the home consumption of chocolates, and made the author rich. Under the title was to be the glittering legend:

BY MATTHEW AND SOPHIE OGG

That Ogg subsequently forgot this pact was perhaps due to the unaccustomed inebriation of wooing, for he had always confined himself to writing about other people's love affairs, and had never had one himself. Then there was the unprecedented interruption of the wedding and the honeymoon trip to the seashore, where he was kept busy spending a part of last year's royalties.

Mrs. Ogg hadn't forgotten. Whenever she was alone, she revised and refurbished sketches of her characters, practiced upon bits of dialogue, and prepared generally for the time when they would return to the comfortable Ogg study—the literary workshop where they had labored and loved—and there begin assembling notes and breathing a strong twin life into the Ogg family's great novel.

Sophie was now known as "Matthew Ogg's wife." She yearned to forge ahead



on a fleet literary steed to a point where the public would give deserved recognition to her genius. Some day, she fully expected, she would be world famous, and Matthew would be referred to as "Mrs. Ogg's husband."

That was her goal; and here, right in the midst of their first breakfast at home, with a day of delightful collaboration ahead of them, they had quarreled over the family novel!

Ogg, looking up from his poached egg, exhibited amazement when his bride began talking of "our novel." The possessive pronoun jarred him. He stared at her as she rattled on about characters and plot and dénouement.

"Really, my dear, you can't be serious about wanting to help write the story?"

That was his first unfortunate remark. It was as if he had pressed a button. The lid of her temper flew off instantly. It was more than an angry look Mrs. Ogg shot him. There was fight in her eye.

"Matthew!" Her tone was icy. "Do you forget your promise—our plans for the book?"

Ogg, jolted back to earth, remorsefully recalled his weakness. He wanted to struggle, but already his bride had produced a neat sheaf of notes, nicely caught together at the top. No, not with a businesslike paper clip—with ribbon!

He groaned, and accepted the ribboned sheets to read. Ogg was getting his first lesson in domestic docility.

He had started very badly. He knew it; for, as he read, he stole a look over his glasses and saw his wife sitting very straight and looking very cold and determined. She was waiting, no doubt, to pounce upon him and verbally tear him to pieces at his first word of criticism.

Though a novelist, Ogg did not lack courage. When he had glanced through the notes, he leisurely got up, strolled toward the study door, and then stopped and looked at Mrs. Ogg.

She had risen, too.

"Well?" she said.

It was only natural, when he replied, that his tone should sound a bit superior. In a gently admonishing way he said:

"Really, my dear, we must not be ridiculous. I fear your heroine is too—er—*anæmic*."

Mrs. Ogg was left gasping.

"She isn't! Right off you find fault—

you, who probably haven't given a thought to a plot or a character!"

"Oh, yes, I have. I've got it all planned—notes in my desk. Really, if you want to help, all right; but we must be sane. Take my hero, *Basil Mainwaring*. He's a real red-blooded, two-fisted, masculine person. How can I blend into his vigorous characterization the bloodless heroine you have created?"

Ogg paused, as if to let his pronouncement sink into an inferior intellect.

"Why," he went on, "her very name is enough to spoil the whole thing. *Gwendolyn*! What an appalling name! It belongs to the Bertha M. Clay age of near-literature. Trashy! Undignified! It isn't being done any more, you know."

Ogg tapped the rolled sheets of Mrs. Ogg's notes against the palm of his hand and pushed through the study door in graceful retreat.

Rage and mortification tied Mrs. Ogg's tongue, but did not paralyze her feet. She hurried after her husband, and faced him across the wide flat-topped desk as he sat down in his workroom. He took a tablet from a drawer and put it before him on the desk, beside the ribboned notes.

"Just to show you that I have made some notes," he explained. Looking up at her, he went on, placidly judicial: "*Gwendolyn* will never do. Plain names are the thing, like *Mary* or *Ida Jane* or *Sarah Ann*—"

The volcano erupted. Wrath and sarcasm chased each other up and down the scale in Mrs. Ogg's tone:

"*Sarah*, fiddlesticks! She's *my* heroine. I know what I want to call her. She's *Gwendolyn*! I created her, didn't I? I'm going to name her. Common names, indeed! Why don't you practice what you preach? *Basil Mainwaring*! What a mollycoddle name! Better change it to *John Henry Jones*."

"Really, my dear—"

"Don't you d-dear me!" exclaimed the bride, forecasting showers.

She leaned against the desk and dabbed at her eyes. Matthew Ogg looked annoyed. Anger mastered the lady's threatened tears, however.

"You act as if I didn't know a thing about writing a novel! Haven't I slaved at your typewriter for three years? Can you run a typewriter? No, you can't! Where would you have been, I'd like to

know, without me to do the *real* work? A literary failure—that's what!"

"There, there, my dear—"

"Don't talk to me, Matthew Ogg! You're a cheat—a literary pirate! Your promises are like your books—empty! I was to be your collaborator. What a joke! I wouldn't get you out of the literary swamp you're in if you were up to your ears and begged me for help! I'm through!"

She reached over to snatch up his tablet and her ribboned notes. The former she sailed viciously into the air. It hit the wall in the corner and fell with a thud behind a davenport.

"That for your *Basil* hero!"

Ogg jumped up. Ignoring him, Sophie regarded her own neat sheaf of notes for a tender moment, and then flung the thing over her shoulder. Papers rattled, and little tails of ribbon fluttered in the air. The sheaf bounced off the wall and dropped behind the bookcase in the opposite corner of the room.

"And that for my *Gwendolyn*—brought into the world to suffer your sneers!"

Very tragic she was as she stalked to the door, where she turned and delivered a parting shot.

"You and your old novel can go to the devil!"

## II

THE door shut with a bang. Ogg still stood staring. Then he fell back limply into his chair. He hadn't had a shock like that in years. Finally he found his tongue.

"Well, I'm damned!"

There was silence for a full minute.

"So am I," suddenly said a muffled feminine voice. "Ain't mother got the wicked tongue?"

Ogg sat up straight, as if he had been jabbed with a pin. Puzzled astonishment and a bit of fright showed in his face.

He nearly fell out of his chair as he saw a girl's head rise over the top of the low bookcase. She was pretty, bobbed-haired, fair, and laughing.

"Hello, Arnold Bennett!" she said breezily.

"He-hello!" he stuttered. Between a gasp and a gape he finished lamely: "I'm not Arnold Bennett, though."

The girl giggled.

"Oh, all right! Don't apologize. Who are you?"

"I'm Matthew Ogg, the novelist." He got up and bowed slightly. "But who are you, and what are you doing hiding behind my bookcase?"

"I'm not hiding. You can see me, can't you?"

"Well, what are you doing there?" inquired Ogg.

"I'm waiting for you to let me out. A gentleman would do that for a lady. I can't move the damned thing. It's too heavy."

"Oh, surely," said Ogg. He moved over and began tugging at the bookcase. "But you mustn't use such language," he went on. "Ladies do not swear."

"They don't, eh? Wait! Ah, fine—now I can get out!"

She squeezed from behind the bookcase, smiled at her rescuer, and calmly walked over and boosted herself to a seat on the top of Ogg's desk.

"Ladies don't swear?" she continued. "Where do you get that stuff? Didn't you hear mother tell you and your old novel to go to the devil?"

Ogg started, and walked up to the desk.

"Mother? You said that before. Whom do you mean by 'mother'?"

"Why, the dame that cussed you out and slammed the door on you."

"Young lady," said Ogg severely, "that was my wife!"

"Your wife? Gosh, she must love her husband!" The girl clapped her hands. "Oh, say! That makes you my papa, doesn't it?"

The startled novelist blushed.

"My dear young lady! Why—"

"No, I guess I'm wrong," she interrupted. "I ain't got no father. I'm fifty per cent orphan."

"How ridiculous! But I must say your language is extremely bad. Didn't you learn grammar in school?"

"I've never been at school."

"What, at your age? How old are you?"

"About five minutes, I should judge. I was born behind the bookcase."

Ogg reeled. He grabbed at a chair for support.

"Great Heavens!" he breathed.

"Was rather sudden, wasn't it?" the girl smiled. "Say, mother's got a strong arm, hasn't she? She can throw like the dickens. Was her father in the American or the National League?"

"Don't be silly," said the muddled Ogg rudely. "Now, tell me what you mean by all this gabble about mother. What is your name?"

"My name? Gosh, I thought you knew! You must be thick-headed—and a novelist, too! My goodness! Why, I'm Gwendolyn."

Ogg's knees gave out. He collapsed into the chair, wondering vaguely if he was going mad. His eyes popped as he gazed up at the grinning girl on the desk. He thought of getting up and pinching her, to see if she was real; but he felt too weak to move.

"Well, I'm damned!" he muttered.

"Don't get so tragic," said Gwendolyn. "This is supposed to be a light and joyful affair."

"What is?"

"Why, this book I'm in—the novel you and mother were writing till she got mad and gave you a savage walkout."

Ogg snapped out of his limpness and regarded the girl sternly.

"Now see here, young lady, don't try to tell me such nonsense! It's absurd for you to sit there, a living, breathing human being, and inform a person of my intelligence that you are a character in a novel come to life. Utter absurdity!"

"It's not absurd. I can't help it. I didn't ask to be born behind your old bookcase. I just happened. That artist's model, *Galatea*, couldn't help it, could she, when she popped to life? I suppose I'm a *Galatea* of fiction. Romantic, don't you think?"

The novelist jumped up and began striding up and down the room. He ran his fingers through his hair and scowled.

"What a day! What a day! Either I'm crazy or I'm dreaming!"

Gwendolyn looked sympathetic.

"Poor old papa!" she said.

"Papa! Bah! Quit that!"

"Well, you're my foster papa, ain't you?"

"Confound it!" exclaimed Ogg testily. "Don't say 'ain't'!"

"Oh, all right! But you are my foster papa. You're my mother's husband. I'll have to read mother's manuscript, to find out who my real parents are in the book. Gosh, I hope they're rich!"

The girl slid off the table and ran over to the bookcase. She began poking behind it, and got several wrinkled pages of notes.

One, with ribbon hanging to the top, was badly torn. She held it up.

"See, papa, that must be the page I came out of. Here at the top it says '*Gwendolyn*' in capital letters. Isn't that a pretty name?"

"Ghastly!" said Ogg, subsiding gloomily upon the davenport.

Gwendolyn opened her mouth to retort—and closed it. An unexpected interruption came. It was a very definite groan. The girl jumped, and the man started.

"What's that?" exclaimed Gwendolyn.

"How do I know?" said Ogg sulkily. "Nothing would surprise me now. Maybe it was your manuscript grandfather groaning in his grave."

"Horrid thing! I don't blame mother for cussing you. I'm sure I heard a groan." She did, for at that moment it sounded again. "There it goes the second time. Sounds as if it comes from your corner."

She ran over. Ogg jumped up. The girl knelt on the davenport and looked over the back of it. She gave a little scream.

"Oh-h-h! The poor thing! Look, Papa Ogg—it's a *man*!"

The harried novelist, now properly agitated, took a look.

"Well, I'm damned!" he said.

"Is that all you can say? You've said the same thing four times. You talk like a one-cylinder parrot." Gwendolyn gave him a push. "Why don't you do something, instead of standing there like a ninny damning yourself? Pull out the davenport, Papa Ogg!"

### III

Thus spurred, Ogg functioned obediently. The two went behind the davenport and dragged out the figure of a man, apparently unconscious. He was young, dark-haired, and good-looking, and wore good clothes.

Ogg laid him on the davenport. The girl knelt down and bent over the sleeper. She stroked his forehead, while Ogg looked on, scowling.

"Ain't he—I mean aren't he—the handsome thing? Poor, dear boy! Where does it hurt you, you sweet thing—groaning and everything all alone behind the old sofa?"

Ogg grimaced.

"What silly rot! Talk sense! Maybe you're mad, though. I must be. My study is a madhouse. Girl behind the bookcase—man behind the davenport! Probably

snakes in my desk—and bats in my head!" He strode to the desk and got a glass of water. "Here, dash this over his manly beauty, and he'll probably come to life."

The girl took the water, and, pouring some into the palm of her hand, began gently to bathe the stranger's temples. It worked. The man stirred.

"Oh, look!" cried Gwendolyn. "He's waking up."

"Where am I?" said a weak voice.

"Maybe he's a male *Galatea*," suggested Ogg. "Anyway, he runs true to form. All unconscious persons say the same thing when they come to—'Where am I?'"

"I know they do—in your novels!" Having delivered this shot, Gwendolyn turned sympathetically to her patient. "You're all right. You're safe among friends—one, anyway."

That seemed to reassure the youth. He sat up, looked around, and grinned.

"My word! I must have had a jolly hard knock. Hello! Who's the charming nurse?"

Gwendolyn got to her feet and smiled.

"I'm not a nurse. I'm Gwendolyn."

"Greetings, Miss Gwendolyn! Delighted, I'm sure!" He looked at the novelist, who stood regarding him with hostile mien. "Who's the elderly tragedian?"

Ogg glared.

"Young man, don't be so flippant," he said gruffly. "Please explain yourself. What were you doing behind my sofa—sleeping off a jag? How did you get into my house? Who are you? What do you want? Be quick—be quick!"

"Cease firing! One at a time, please! I don't know how I got behind your sofa. I didn't even know it was your sofa. I wasn't tight, worse luck! Search me how I got into your house!"

Ogg started to interrupt. The youth held up a hand.

"Wait! I'm not through answering your questions. Let me see, where was I? Oh, yes—my name. Well, I'm Basil Mainwaring."

The novelist started, and looked as if he were going to have a fit.

"Yes, that's it," the youth said, grinning. "It's a devilish name, but I'm not responsible for that, am I? The last I remember, I was a character in a novel. The old codger who created me got into a fight with his wife, and she began throwing things. After that everything's blank."

Ogg gave a despairing moan.

"Suffering snakes! A fine pair you two are!" He pointed a shaking finger at Gwendolyn. "That's what she said—she came out of a novel, too!"

A cackling laugh escaped him. Like a tortured soul he began charging up and down the room.

"Lunatics!" he raged. "You both talk silly rot! Novel characters are imaginary—any fool knows that! How can they come to life? Ridiculous!"

He paused and confronted the pair, the girl having edged closed to the grinning youth on the sofa. He shook a lean finger at them.

"You two tell fishy stories! Team-work, too. Sounds like a frame-up. Burglars, probably! I've a notion to call the police."

Basil smiled reproachfully.

"That's a fine way to talk to your own son—"

"And to your own wife's daughter," put in Gwendolyn.

Ogg pawed the air.

"Dry up, both of you! What bosh! You'll steal my wits as well as the family plate."

"If we *did*," said Basil, "it would be a manifestation of heredity."

"What in blazes do you mean, you impertinent child—that I'm a thief?"

"In a literary sense, yes. It's quite obvious. You pinched me as a character to palm off as your own brain child. Why, the moment I laid eyes on Gwendolyn, I knew that I'd seen her before. In my last literary life I was a character in a G. K. Chesterton novel, and she was a Robert Chambers heroine. We stood next to each other on a shelf in the Public Library, and we used to have long talks. You pinched me, and your wife froze on to Gwendolyn. Just a change of names—and there you are. Easy time you writing chaps have—get your characters like a ready-made suit of clothes, right off the shelf!"

Basil grinned, and got up from the sofa. Ogg was leaning limply against the desk. Basil slapped him on the shoulder and went on:

"But don't take on so, old sock! All the novelists do it. You're not alone in crime. Lord, I've been reincarnated so many times I've lost count!"

"Ain't it the truth, Basil?" agreed Gwendolyn. "Gosh, I'm glad the war's



over. The way the novelist chaps dragged me up and down the map of Europe was a caution. Had to learn half a dozen languages and live in filthy holes—a lady spy one time, then a Red Cross nurse, a Belgian refugee, and a forlorn war bride back in Blighty. Terrible!”

“I know how you feel, old girl,” said Basil sympathetically. “It has been the same way with me. I had to do my bit. The writer chaps made me. Why, I even did a turn in Archangel!”

Gwendolyn laughed.

“Eternal life for us, eh? We’re a thousand years old, anyway.”

“Easily that, and then some. Why, girly, Rider Haggard even had me in Tibet. I was one of those long-lived monks on the edge of nowhere. And goodness knows where Haggard cribbed me from. My memory doesn’t stretch that far back!”

“But let’s not kick,” said Gwendolyn. “Look how popular we are. If some author broke the union rules, and got original, and created a brand-new hero or heroine or plot—all new and no rebuilt models—why, old boy, we’d be out of a job!”

Ogg bounced out of his stupor.

“I say, you two—”

Basil was too busy to notice him.

“So we would. But, say, that union thing is a ripping idea. Let’s form a union of our own!”

“Splendid! What ’ll we call it?”

“The Authors’ Characters’ Union.”

“No,” said Gwendolyn, “that sounds as if the authors own us. Besides—”

“God knows we don’t own you!” exclaimed Ogg, shaking his head belligerently. “A couple of hero Bolsheviks organizing a union right in my own study! I ought to call an officer—”

“Oh, go and tickle your typewriter,” broke in Basil. He turned back to the girl. “Well, call it the Literary Characters’ Union.”

“No,” she objected, “that’s sailing under false colors. We’re not very literary, are we? I ask you!” She smiled toward Ogg, who made a wry face, picked a newspaper off the desk, and pretended to be reading it.

Basil laughed.

“That’s a shot for papa! You’re right, we’re hardly literary. I’ve often heard people calling the book I happened to be in a potboiler!”

“Yes,” said Gwendolyn, “and I’ve often

been mortified to death when a book I was in was barred from young ladies’ boarding schools.”

“We do get into rough hands,” Basil sighed. “We ought to legislate in our union rules against hack writers who misuse us.”

“And we must demand union hours,” Basil. Why, my next to last author kept me working like a truck horse in love scenes, day and night. None of us got a moment’s rest—and the story covered a period of three weeks! I had to go away for the summer and rest up as a character in a dull farm story—daughter of the village vicar doing charities among the poor farm hands and their overworked wives, and lying out on the mossy bank of the lazy river thinking about the *Prince Charming* from Broadway who never came. It was frightfully dull and unexciting; but I got my health and strength back, and I was all full of pep when Mother Ogg grabbed me.”

Basil smiled sympathetically and suggested that they might leave the uncomfortable Ogg to his own devices.

“Let’s go over to the Public Library and call a meeting of characters. We’ll find them all there, including ourselves—all our other selves.”

The novelist looked relieved. He slipped off the desk and hurried over to open the door.

“Yes, get out—both of you!” he said. “Go—before you reveal your real characters and loot the house!”

As they went out, Basil mocked him:

“I really ought to bust you one for such insults, pop—but then there’s a law against parricide.”

Ogg slammed the door.

#### IV

For the moment, peace reigned in the study, though not in Matthew Ogg’s mind. His overtaxed brain felt like a soft-boiled egg. He debated whether to call the police or to send for an alienist. He was troubled over the quarrel with his wife, and worried over his amazing visitors. The monumental absurdity of their conversation was practically contradicted by the extraordinary coincidence of their relation to the notes for the novel he and his bride had made. And their inexplicable presence—one behind the bookcase, the other behind the davenport!

Ogg wondered if this was the way people felt when they began to go insane. He decided to call his wife and tell her the whole bewildering story. Sophie, with her common sense, would help him.

He opened the door to call her—and Gwendolyn walked in!

"Oh!" she said. "How you startled me! I was just going to knock. I forgot something."

The confused novelist backed into the room till he bumped against the desk. He watched the girl as she carefully shut the door and came close to him. Utterly unable to resist, as if under a hypnotic eye, he glassily watched her play with the end of his tie.

"Now, foster papa, I want you to be nice," she said purringly. "I've sent Basil on to the Public Library. I've been appointed an officer of our union—chairman of the finance committee."

"Finance committee?" Matthew repeated hazily.

"Finance committee—that's it. What I want to know is, how do we eat? Where do we sleep?"

Ogg laughed vacantly.

"Now it's blackmail, eh? Why not sleep in my house?" His tone was bitter. "You've taken possession of it, anyway. Come and live with me, little girl!"

That last remark of his was extremely unfortunate; for, just in time to hear it, came Mrs. Ogg—the exasperated, resentful Mrs. Ogg, smarting under the unhealed fracture of her literary ambitions!

She was in no mood to hear her new husband issue such an invitation to a person whom he called "little girl." She was only just in time, and the detective instinct that most women have halted her, all brakes set, before she had burst upon the scene.

She had come through the dining room, and the half opened door of the study shielded her. It also hid from her view the couple in the study, but she could hear her husband's voice, and that telltale last sentence; and now she heard a feminine voice.

"That's a dear old papa!" the girl exclaimed enthusiastically. "I'm going to kiss you for that!"

She did. Mrs. Ogg, by reason of the door ajar, missed the picture of the kiss, but she heard the smack all too plainly. She frowned forbiddingly, gritted her teeth, clenched her fists—and waited, afraid that

she would hear more and afraid that she wouldn't hear more. Unfortunately for Ogg, she did not see him struggle weakly and ineffectually against the kiss.

"You *are* an old darling!" Gwendolyn was rattling on. "Mother will love you more and more for recognizing me as your child!"

The woman hidden in the doorway nearly fainted. She smothered a cry, which ended in a gulp. The noise, slight as it was, rasped Ogg's frazzled nerves.

"What was that?" he demanded hoarsely, drawing away from his tormentor in alarm.

"Nothing, old dear. Probably your conscience sneezed."

"More likely yours, if you had one," returned Ogg bitterly, recovering himself. "Now what do you want? Be quick! My wife may return at any moment."

The eavesdropping Mrs. Ogg glared triumphantly at a knot in the door. She shivered to think how close she came to missing this clandestine meeting. Right in their own house, too!

"Oh, she won't mind," said the girl, blithely unaware that she was minding hugely, silently objecting with a calm, cold, stern "I will bide my time" look on her face.

"I want money," Gwendolyn went on. "You've got to give me money to live on. Wasn't I brought into the world behind your bookcase?"

That just about finished the hidden Mrs. Ogg. Vaguely she heard the rustle of money. She pushed open the door just as Ogg, his bill case in his hand, was giving the girl several bank notes.

"Oh, all right," he was saying, in the tired tone of a man who knew when he was beaten and helpless. "I suppose you've got me!"

Then Ogg saw Mrs. Ogg.

Everything instantly seemed topsy-turvy. His jaw dropped. He turned pale and reeled.

The girl's back was toward the dining room door. She looked up from the more attractive task of counting the money. Half a glance was enough. She saw the stern figure of Mrs. Ogg. With a little scream, she ran to the closed hall door and hid her face in her arm. Her shoulders shook like quivering jelly.

Mrs. Ogg ignored her. She would crush the man first!

She glared fiercely at the wabbly-kneed novelist.

"She's got you, has she? You're wrong, Matthew Ogg! It's I who have got you—both of you!"

Her distraught target fumbled feebly for words.

"B-but, my dear—" he began, with a smirk.

His wife was ruthless.

"I saw you, Matthew Ogg! You can't deny it. I saw you give money to this woman!"

"I'll ex-plain—"

"Didn't you?" she insisted.

"Yes, my dear."

Ogg was weak and chastened. The stern figure of wrath, standing there like a recording angel, a female prosecuting attorney, hurt his eyes.

"Are you keeping her?"

His cross-examiner's question was frigidly sarcastic.

"No—yes—oh, hell, *no!*"

Ogg was becoming panicky. He stole a glance at the girl, who was still hiding her face against the hall door. He wondered how soon she would be mincemeat.

"Guilty confusion!" rasped Mrs. Ogg. "A horrible secret in your life! A *child!* Oh, you—you beast!"

Icicles in her tone were melting. Hysteria was imminent. She collapsed into a chair, burying her face in her hands.

Ogg pulled himself together.

"Not *my* child," he said gruffly. "*Your* child!"

His wife looked up, wild-eyed.

"Mine?" she shrieked. "What nonsense! Are you mad or—"

Somebody had laughed—actually laughed! At such a tragic moment! Mrs. Ogg bit off her remark indignantly. She looked around, and saw the charming, laughing face of the hitherto ignored young female. Tiring of her self-imposed punishment of standing with her face to the wall, Gwendolyn propelled herself into the scene.

Mrs. Ogg gulped twice and leaped up. She seized the girl's hand.

"Gwen? *You?*" she shrieked.

Ogg popped to attention.

"Yes, mother," Gwendolyn said chastely. "Aren't you glad it wasn't somebody else?"

"Then you *are* Gwendolyn?" demanded Ogg.

"Sure I'm Gwen!"

Ogg seemed awed.

"Out of a book—a manuscript—an unwritten book! Lord help us, we're all as mad as rabbits!"

V

Mrs. Ogg stared at them in perplexity.

"What do you mean, out of a book? You're incoherent." She turned to Gwen.

"What brought you here, child?"

"You did, Sophie," said Ogg, grinning maliciously, for this was the first remark that had pleased him.

"No, Basil did," corrected Gwen.

"Basil?" exclaimed Ogg, staggering under another shock. "Then Basil is real, too, is he?"

"Of course he's real!"

"Great godfather! Two characters come to life! She sticks to it! And Sophie recognizes her brain child! A padded cell—quick!"

Mrs. Ogg looked at him in astonishment.

"What's all this raving?" she demanded.

"Who's Basil?"

"He's mine," said Gwen.

"No, he's mine," argued Ogg, with a smirk. "You said so yourself—I created him."

"You silly thing!" Gwen broke in. "He's real, and he's mine—the sweet boy!"

Ogg was too far gone to hear. He grinned vacantly and pointed at his wife.

"It's your fault, Sophie. You threw him up against the wall, and he was born behind the sofa. Scandalous!"

"What?" exploded his bewildered bride.

"Listen—" pleaded Gwen.

Ogg was pacing up and down the room, clapping his hands like an automaton, and mumbling:

"An emancipated hero—broke out of the library—turned Bolshevik—organizer of the Literary Characters' Union—a fresh youth, too—referred to me as an 'elderly tragedian'!"

Mrs. Ogg stamped her foot.

"End this nonsense!" she cried angrily.

"What are you two talking about? Shut up, Matthew Ogg! Now, Gwen, you tell me what this is all about. Talk sense!"

"Well, you see, mother—"

The novelist interrupted stridently.

"There she goes again with that mother business! Mrs. Ogg, I demand to know here and now whether you are this young female's mother or not!"

"Young female, indeed!" exclaimed his

wife indignantly. "A fine way to talk about my little niece!"

"Great Caesar's ghost! Niece! Then you're not her mother? Why the devil does she keep calling you mother? She's been doing it all morning."

"No, I'm not her mother. She's my sister's little girl."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Ogg fervently. "She's been placed genealogically! You admit, then, that she's not *my* hidden child—not the dark secret in *my* life?"

"Oh, Matthew, don't be absurd! I call her my child and she calls me mother because I'm her foster mother—the only m-mother she's got!" Mrs. Ogg was getting damp again. "I adopted her, a wee baby, when my poor sister and her husband died. I know it's a shock to you, Matthew. I should have t-told you; but I just forgot. It didn't in-interest you when I was just your se-secretary. And since then, with her safely in school, as I thought, and my mind taken up with other things—"

"With plots and romantic characters," put in Ogg meanly.

Gwen giggled.

"See, I told you you were my foster papa!"

Ogg drew himself up sternly, rapidly gathering confidence and masterfulness. His tone attained paternal severity.

"Now, young lady, perhaps you will be good enough to tell your aunt—I mean your mother—what a young hoodlum you've been in my study!"

"Don't you call Gwen a hoodlum!" said Mrs. Ogg, bristling.

"Well, I was, mother. That wouldn't be anything new—you know that. I just couldn't stand that dreadful Miss Plank's School for Young Ladies another moment. Miss Plank would second the motion about me being a hoodlum, all right. She was on the point of writing you to take me away when I beat it."

"Gwen!" her foster mother reproved. "What horrible language!"

"Well, I skipped—I mean, I left. And I met Basil—"

"Who is Basil?"

"My hero!" said Ogg savagely.

"No—mine," smiled the girl. "He's the beautifullest boy you ever saw. Goes to Axminster College, across the lake from Miss Plank's—or, rather, he *did* go there. He beat it, too—with me. I've known him three years. We're eloping!"

The Ogg family gasped.

"He followed me up to Uncle Henry's each summer, and worked on the farm, just to be near me," Gwen rattled on. "Wasn't it romantic? I guess they were going to fire him from college about now, too; so we ran away at the psychological moment. We didn't exactly elope, either; for we came right here—got in this morning—to ask if we could be married. We just walked in, and nobody was in sight. Then we heard you and Papa Ogg in the dining room, arguing about the novel—"

"Gwen!"

Mrs. Ogg was horrified. It is humiliating to have children hear a family fight.

"Yes," Gwen ran on, "we heard it all. We thought it was just too funny about you naming your heroine after me, and Papa Ogg happening to pick out a name like Basil—just like one of those stupid coincidences in a novel." She smiled mischievously at Ogg, who got red. "Then we heard you coming. I made Basil get behind the sofa, and I squeezed behind the bookcase, to play a joke on you. We listened, and then there was another coincidence—just like a sure enough story—you throwing the manuscripts, mother! And when you dashed out in a huff—"

"Gwen!" exclaimed Mrs. Ogg feebly.

She felt ridiculous, especially when she noticed her husband's fiendish grin.

"Well, anyway," Gwen went on, "when you threw the manuscripts every which way, I had a bright idea—"

"Corking idea—my hat!" exclaimed Ogg.

The girl ignored the interruption.

"It made me boil to hear Papa Ogg sneer at my name and call it anæmic; so I pretended I was your heroine come to life out of your manuscript. I gave Basil the office—he was on, quick as a wink—and he pretended he was the hero, jolted to life when you cracked Papa Ogg's notes up against the wall. We just had a perfectly glorious time pulling Papa Ogg's leg—and then you busted in!"

Out of breath, Gwen took refuge in giggling. Ogg was silent. He would let Mrs. Ogg speak; it wasn't his funeral now.

"I don't know what I'll ever do with you, Gwen," Mrs. Ogg said weakly. "You're such a responsibility!"

Gwen brightened.

"Let Basil have me," she suggested. "He wants me."



"Yes, do!" said Ogg spitefully. "You ought to punish Basil, too!"

That earned him reproachful glances from both the girl and her mother.

"Where is Basil?" asked Mrs. Ogg, after a pause.

"Oh, he's in the pantry," replied Gwen. "I hid him there while I came back to touch Papa Ogg for the price of a marriage license."

"Holy mackerel!" cried the dismayed novelist. "What a nerve! Is Basil broke?"

"Yes, but he's ambitious—like a poor but honest hero in a novel. Wait—I'll call him."

She skipped over, opened the door to the hall, and gave one of those shrill feminine "ooo-hoo" cries.

In a moment the young man appeared in the doorway. He smiled and walked in with the utmost assurance, one arm around Gwen's waist. Quite evidently he had been listening. His weather forecast was "fair, with no change in temperature." Ogg regarded him suspiciously, as if he wanted to touch him to assure himself of the young man's solidity.

"Mother," said Gwen, "this is Basil."

The youth bowed.

"A pleasure indeed—er—mother!" he said politely.

Mrs. Ogg smiled feebly. Ogg frowned and pushed forward.

"Say," he demanded, "is your name really Basil?"

"Yes—it's my middle name."

"Mainwaring?" persisted Ogg.

The other laughed.

"No—Smith—plain John B. Smith. The Basil is silent, as in B. Much commoner, isn't it? Plain names are the thing—what?"

Ogg started to say something, but Basil had the floor.

"Wait!" he went on. "Let's come to the point and talk business. We're going to get married, Gwen and yours truly. Breaks all fiction speed records—hero and heroine get married before the first chapter's even down on paper. 'Chapter One—Wedding Bells'! Great line! Rejuvenation of fiction! New literary era dawns—the firm of Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Ogg frames up the novels, and the firm of Mr. and Mrs. J. Basil Smith hammers 'em out on the typewriter! Gwen and I are both good typists—we learned to typewrite, as well as to love each other, in school. We're broke—haven't a nickel to start our married life on—and we need a job—I mean jobs, plural. Collaboration of brains—collaboration of hands! Do we get the job—jobs?"

### A SONG OF ROSES

THE red rose flaunts its beauteous bloom  
Where the worldly folk abide;  
The white rose, set in a templed room,  
Is enamored of pomp and pride;  
But the wild rose breathes its soft perfume  
O'er the quiet countryside.

The white rose blooms in the current mode,  
In a glassed and sheltered hall;  
The red rose brightens a proud abode,  
And is trained on the garden wall;  
But the wild rose flowers by the open road,  
To gladden the hearts of all.

The red rose throbs of the lustful years,  
As the mad world marches on;  
The white rose sobs of our doubts and fears  
When a life we have loved is gone;  
But the wild rose smiles through its morning tears  
That a new day brings its dawn!

*Edmund Vance Cooke*

# The Bullfighter

A ROMANCE OF THE THRILLING SPORT OF THE ARENA

By T. S. Stribling

Author of "Birthright," "East Is East," etc.

PANCHO PACHECHO, a young Venezuelan of humble birth, has won fame and money as a favorite *torero* of the bull ring in Caracas, under the name of Angelito. He has built himself a showy house, in which he lives with his mother; but the old peasant woman poses as his servant, lest she should disgrace her son before his fine new friends.

One of these friends is Rafael Jimenez, a young aristocrat of Paraiso, the fashionable quarter of Caracas. Young Jimenez, who is full of romantic ideas, is a poet and an amateur *torero*. When Angelito goes to the provincial city of Valencia for a bullfight, Rafael insists on accompanying him as second swordsman, and is gored by a bull. Angelito takes his wounded friend to his own house in Caracas, and Rafael's mother, Señora Jimenez, and his sister, Señorita Socorro Jimenez, go there to nurse him. Thus thrown in contact with the handsome *señorita*, the *torero* falls desperately in love with her, and she—in spite of her social superiority, and although she is betrothed to a man of her own caste, Narciso Montauban—is strangely impressed with the stalwart Angelito.

Rafael recovers from his wound, and is brought back from Angelito's house to the Jimenez villa. On the following Sunday, Señor Montauban takes his *fiancée*, with her mother and a friend, Señorita Margarita Miraflores, to his box at the Nuevo Circo, to attend the weekly bullfight. Socorro Jimenez sees Angelito enter the arena to kill the first bull; and as the powerful brute charges him, she falls in a dead faint.

## XIII

WHEN Señor Montauban delivered his unfortunate box party at the Jimenez home, Socorro Jimenez walked weakly up the long path from the tall iron fence to the house. She retired immediately to her bedchamber, and lay down on a pink covered bed. The maid, Lizetta, removed her slippers and loosened her dress, while Margarita helped to make her friend comfortable with a sympathetic monologue.

"The excitement was too much for you, *carisima*. I am sure it was a judgment of Providence, for we really ought not to have gone out so soon after Rafael's illness. At least, it was ill mannered, and one might as well be wicked as ill mannered. If I were Providence, I would punish one as quickly as the other."

Later Lizetta prepared the invalid a cup of strong coffee. Señorita Jimenez drank the black liquid, and then Margarita closed the jealousies to keep out the green glare reflected from the shrubbery, and the friend and the maid tiptoed from the room.

Socorro Jimenez remained in the cool, darkened chamber with the vision of the bullfight still harassing her nerves. The fight was still in progress, she knew. It would continue for some two hours longer. She lifted her head and tried to make out the time from a little gilt clock on her dressing table. She could see merely the round blur of its dial, which shook to a throbbing in her eyes.

For two more hours bull after bull would be turned into the arena, and if Angelito made any false step, any miscalculated movement, it might result in his sudden and terrible death. The very midriff of the girl seemed to writhe within her. Lying down became unbearable. She pushed herself up and stared about her chamber.

"Holy Virgin," she murmured, "I think I must be mad! I have overworked from nursing Rafael."

But the mere thought of Rafael reproduced the blue *casa* on Traposo Calle, the queer ornamentation of his sick room, the tinted columns of the *patio*, and the owner of the house, whose eyes had followed her perpetually as she came and went. And

at this very moment the man who had watched her so unhappily was fighting bulls in the *circo*!

She drew a deep breath. Then she thought:

"Nothing will happen to him. He has been our leading *diestro* for years. Nothing will happen to him. I wonder where he came from!"

She lay back down, closed her eyes, and tried to drop off into a siesta; but she remained intensely awake behind her closed lids. She thought of Señor Montauban, and of her approaching marriage to him. The idea brought her a queer little feeling of distress.

Heretofore the notion of marriage with the little editor connoted mainly the managing of the Montauban château, directing the Montauban servants, preparing for balls and dinners, and driving in the Montauban motor. Narciso, heretofore, had entered into these reveries as a graceful partner. Now, as Socorro lay with closed lids, this strange commotion within her made her realize that marriage was something quite other than these things. She felt that it was a vital and formidable thing; that out of the obscure clouds of marriage some sort of emotional and spiritual storm would surely beset her.

A vivid image of Señor Montauban popped before her eyes—his baldness, his witheredness, his precise articulation, all a little exaggerated, a little burlesqued, as if some imp in her brain would caricature him. As she stared at this image and thought of his eternal criticisms, his annoying meticulousness, his disagreeable little gusts of caresses, a sort of horror passed over Socorro.

She opened her eyes, got up abruptly from her bed, thrust her small silk-clad feet into red boudoir slippers, and moved nervously about the room. As she passed her mirror, she paused to correct her disheveled appearance. She fastened her dress at the throat, and tucked in a few loose strands of hair. Then she opened the door that connected her room with the *patio*.

The glare of yellow sunshine made her blink for a moment, and then she walked across the *patio* to the room opposite her own. The door of this chamber stood open, and, looking through the entrance, she saw Rafael leaning back among a pile of pillows, with a writing board propped against an upraised knee. On her brother's hand-

some face there was a look of suffering and cynicism which Socorro had never observed before.

As the girl came through the sunshine to his room, Rafael glanced up at her. He continued gazing at her abstractedly for several moments, as if he did not see her. Then he said, as if faintly startled:

"Ah, come in, Socorro! *Maman* and Margarita told me about your fainting at the *circo*. The sport seems to be rather hard on us Jiminezes." He smiled slightly. "How do you feel now?"

The girl entered the room, and noticed its smell of cigarette smoke.

"Better, *gracias*. The coffee helped me, I think."

She hesitated a moment as Rafael motioned her to a chair. Then, as she sank into it, she asked:

"Did they tell you why I fainted?"

"They said you were worrying over me." He paused a moment, regarding her interrogatively. "I didn't exactly believe that," he added.

"No?"

"No, but I didn't say anything."

"Why?"

Rafael made a weak, discouraged gesture with his hands.

"I've quit talking to them, Socorro."

The girl was shocked.

"*Anda*, Rafael! You don't mean it?"

"Yes, I do. What's the use? They never seem to understand what I'm talking about."

"They understand Spanish, Rafael."

"You know what I mean. Everything I think or say is simply foolishness to them."

Socorro sat staring at her brother.

"And yet you are going to marry Margarita!" she observed anxiously.

Rafael looked at her with a faint quirk-  
ing of the lips.

"I believe I am not the only one in this *casa* about to be married."

Socorro's face reddened, and she looked away at the sharp definition of the sunshine where it fell in through the doorway. It was so bright that it seemed a white, ethereal flame burning on the floor. After a while she asked:

"What are you writing?"

"A poem."

"Read it to me."

"It isn't finished."

"What are you going to call it?"

"Glands."

"What a queer name for a poem!"

"Cà, yes, it's queer. I call it that to be different. Everything I do or say, Socorro, you understand, is merely to be different."

In the girl's tremulous mood this faint irony filled her with pathos. She leaned forward and pressed the invalid's hand.

"Poor Rafael! I suppose you are quite alone writing your poems!" She gave a deep sigh, and leaned back with arms outstretched, so that she might still hold the wounded man's hand. "I do wish Margarita could understand you a little better, Rafael—I do indeed!"

"Do you remember the Greek myth, Socorro, about Paris and his golden apple?"

"Pues, yes?"

"I am sure he would have liked very much to divide his golden apple between Venus and Minerva, and to give each goddess half, but that was impossible. There is no way to divide the apple, Socorro, or to combine the two goddesses into one. I think every human being reaches an *impasse* of that sort at last."

"What a terrible idea!"

"No—it simply means that every person's idea of happiness is a bundle of contradictions. To acquire one thing, a person must sacrifice some other thing. The more you think about it, the simpler it grows, and—the more absurd."

Socorro was shocked at this unexpected revelation of her brother's chronic unhappiness. It appealed to her more keenly now that he was crippled. She felt tears wet her eyes as she gazed tenderly at him.

"But surely, Rafael," she cried, disregarding the logic of his pessimism, "surely out of a whole city you can find some girl who will bring you sympathy and understanding and—and all your heart desires!"

The poet stroked his sister's fingers with a mirthless smile.

"That seems true to all of us when we are young and unphilosophic, Socorro. Every one feels that somewhere on earth there is a perfect being who will understand him deeply and satisfy him profoundly; but the wait stretches out and out, and finally we grow weary and begin to lose faith in our ideal who never, never comes. At last we marry just an ordinary person, and that phase of life is finished and done."

Socorro leaned forward with horror on her face. An understanding born of her own new passion shook her.

"Oh, Rafael, don't say that! Don't think it, dear Rafael! You know God would not mock us with dreams if they could never, never be realized!"

She slipped an arm about his neck and began weeping softly on his shoulder, spending her pain of the *circo* in her grief.

The poet put an arm about his sister and stroked her shoulder.

"Hush, Socorro! Very likely I am all wrong. My thoughts wander about madly and contradict themselves. Sometimes I have thought that our first dream of love seeks no mortal at all, but that we are trying to unite ourselves with God, our desires are so vague and mysterious and half religious. Dear sister, I don't know who has stirred you so that you faint at the *circo* and then come weeping to me; but I know it was not my wounds that did it. A sister's kindness is more composed than that."

Socorro felt her brother pat her face and press her hot cheek against his own. She lay breathing unevenly, and was rather awestruck at the depth of her brother's wisdom.

"I don't know how to answer you," she said at last.

"Then don't answer me at all."

There came a silence. Then she began tentatively:

"At the *circo* I—I could not endure to see—"

She stopped.

"Yes, *carísima*?"

"To see the—the bull charge—"

"Yes?"

"Angelito," she whispered, and her face swept hot once more.

Again there came a silence. Socorro felt her brother bend his head a trifle, to glance down at her face. She turned her hot face away from his eyes, flooded with a sense of shame, and wondering what he would say.

"Angelito!" repeated Rafael in an amazed voice.

She nodded faintly, her whole sensorium painfully alert to catch his next reaction.

There came a long, disheartening pause. Then Rafael asked:

"But, Socorro, how could you have known him at all? Did you talk with him when I was sick?"

The girl shook her head mutely.

"Did he send you messages?"

"No."



"Then, Socorro, dear sister, how—what—"

The girl turned her face under her brother's chin.

"Oh, Rafael, I don't know! He just kept looking at me. Margarita noticed it—everybody noticed it. That was why *maman* was so unpleasant to him. He seemed so strong, and so unhappy! And his poor dinner! He needed some girl to keep things straight for him. And now what you say about every man waiting for some one—it is pitiful. Everybody is pitiful, and he seems the most pitiful of all!"

Here Socorro clutched her brother's neck and began sobbing frankly out of pity.

Rafael held his sister silently and enigmatically. At last she ceased weeping, and asked in a small voice:

"Pues, what am I to do?"

"I—don't know."

"I don't suppose I shall ever see him again, except when he is fighting bulls, and that makes me faint."

"Angelito!" repeated Rafael.

Socorro moved her head a trifle.

"Are you going to be against me, too?"

"I?"

"Well, you know everybody is going to be against me—*maman* and Margarita and—and everybody. I'm going to have a terrible scene if this comes out!"

Rafael drew a long breath, which lifted Socorro's head a trifle.

"No-o-o," he dragged out at last. "I am not exactly against you, Socorro."

"Then you'll talk for me against *maman* and Margarita?" she asked quickly. "You know, darling, you talk so well!"

Rafael was not prepared to argue that he didn't talk well. He cleared his throat and said nothing.

"So I am going to expect you to, Rafael," said Socorro, sitting up and looking at her brother with a flushed face.

"Pues, you have philosophy on your side, Socorro—biology, an instinctive return to the earth. You know the old fable about the wrestler Antæus, who, each time he was thrown to earth, arose stronger than ever. Well, the passion of the aristocrat for the—"

Socorro did not follow Rafael's application of the old fable of Antæus. Love and admiration for her brother flooded the girl. He was going to talk for her!

She knew that he would puzzle and confuse her mother and Margarita, so that

neither would be able to make heads or tails of what he would say. There would be much recrimination, but it was far better that she should have Rafael on her side than against her. Nobody could be positive that what he said meant anything; and whether he meant anything or not, he would talk endlessly and cuttingly, and she could sit silent through it all.

She was delighted to get Rafael on her side. She pressed her cheek to his once more, then got up and went quickly to her room.

She hardly knew why she had done any of these things; but her talk with Rafael, apparently, had started her on a course of action which she now pursued swiftly and mechanically. She went straight to her room and wrote a note.

"To his excellency, Señor Gabrielo Angel," the note began. It continued thus:

ESTIMABLE SENOR:

I think you are not treating my brother very kindly, to save his life, take him into your *casa*, and then desert him without a word. We would all be very glad to see you, if you can find the time to call. We are at home any evening after seven. With the utmost respect, I am

Your *amiga*,

SOCORRO DE JESUS JIMINEZ.

As she placed this note in an envelope, she wondered, with a certain discomfort, what Narciso Montauban would think about it.

#### XIV

AFTER the trumpet had sounded the death of the last bull, and the mules had trotted in and dragged out its body, the trumpeter of the Nuevo Circo, high up on the northern tier of seats, wiped the mouth of his instrument and slipped it into its dirty bag. Then he stood yawning and looking indolently about him.

Already the spectators were trickling through the great oval incline of seats toward the exit. A thin applause still sounded here and there, but it was lost in the wide spaces of the amphitheater.

As the mules dragged out the last dead bull, the *banderilleros* and *espadas* went about the long, circling balustrade, gathering the cloaks which they had flung up at the beginning of the *corrida*. Those spectators who had been honored with a cloak still lingered in their boxes, to toss back the garment and exchange a compliment with the fighter. Such trifling courtesies were going on all around the oval.

Angelito walked quickly toward the press box, looking forward to this slight social contact with Socorro Jiminez. When he reached the place, he saw that it was deserted, and that his cloak was spread on the balustrade of an empty box.

The bullfighter stood on the sand below, looking up at the piece of carmine velvet left hanging on the rail. A devotee of the sport, three boxes distant, saw the *espada's* plight, and came hurrying around to throw the abandoned cloak down to its owner. The man himself seemed incensed at such an indignity.

"*Caramba*, Señor Angelito!" he cried, as he brushed away some specks of dust on the velvet, and then swung it carefully down into the hands of its owner. "You must excuse such boors. She was doubtless some pretty *mujer* from the provinces, who understands nothing."

The *torero* did not know the man who tossed him his cloak. He bowed with a hot face, murmured a "*gracias*," and went hurrying away toward the dressing room at the southern end of the *circo*.

There Angelito found some of his fellow players taking off their bright ring costumes, while others were already in the showers, washing off the sweat and smell of the bullfight. No one had been hurt, and they were all in a gay mood, shouting and laughing at one another amid the splash and hiss of the water. Much of their talk was of the coming Spanish *corrida*, and of who would be second *espada* to the great Juan Leon.

Ercolito, a mulatto with slender legs, large feet, and splendidly carved shoulders, shouted that he did not want the place. He said he was accustomed to standing up before the slow creole bulls, and the idea of facing a fast Spanish bull was enough to make him—

Here Ercolito used a coarse expression which set the dressing room laughing. The other attendants and the youthful *monosabios* began using the same gross jests, each one attempting to speak a little more foully than the last.

Of late such obscenity had become detestable to Angelito. At this moment it accentuated the insult he believed Socorro Jiminez had given him, and somehow it seemed to justify that insult. She was right in refusing him the small courtesy of tossing back his cloak. All bullfighters were lewd fellows, and so had he been

until he met her. They were nothing but peons whom a turn of fortune had thrust into the glare of fame and wealth; but peons they were and peons they would remain, foul of mind and heart.

The *torero* finished dressing as quickly as he could, and got away from his companions. He started back through the arena, meaning to catch a bus in the plaza.

By this time the amphitheater was entirely deserted. The declining sun filled it with a yellow light, which blurred the distant sweep of seats into an ochreous slope. It might have been that golden cloud which, Angelito so often imagined, lowered Socorro Jiminez every Sunday afternoon, in order that she might see him risk his life in the bull ring for her amusement, and then, when he had finished, lifted her back up into the heaven from whence she came.

That was a heaven forever closed to him. He could only stand on the solid sand, caked by the blood of bulls he had slain, and see her float away from him without so much as a word.

If she had only given him a moment's chance, what would he not say to her?

"*Señorita*," he would say, "I know I am a vile fellow, but the very look of your heavenly face has purified my heart. Indeed, *señorita*, you are like the saints in the cathedral, and the mere thought of you saves me from all sinful fancies. Only that moment, *señorita*, I was driven out of the dressing room because your image filled my heart, and I could not bear to think of you in the presence of such obscenity. And yet you insult the poor cloak of the man who worships you!"

The *torero* made a tragic gesture as he hurried along in the immensity of the amphitheater. He felt the high purity of his rôle with a Latin sense of drama.

As he passed out of the *circo*, he heard the ticket seller whistling gayly in his little booth in the outer wall. Angelito could see him as he sat behind the bars of the ticket window, hurrying through the last of his accounts.

The *torero* hissed at a cab on the other side of the plaza, and then stood looking at the ticket vender with a change of mood.

"Now listen to that ticket butcher whistle," he thought gloomily. "He is hurrying through to go to see some *querida*, some simple girl, and here I stand, Angelito, the premier *espada* in Caracas, who

makes as much in one Sunday afternoon as that *bribon* does all year long, and I feel as if ten devils were lodged in the pit of my stomach. *Diablo!* I should say there are a hundred *señoritas* in Caracas who would welcome me to one who would glance at that *bobo*. That shows what a fool I am to stand here thinking of a girl who leaves my cloak hanging on her balustrade, when I could go to a score of women!"

He hissed again at the cabman. This time the driver caught the signal, pulled his horses around, and trotted toward the *torero*.

As the cab came across the square, Angelito turned over in his mind several addresses at which he knew he would be very welcome indeed. He selected one.

"All I will have to do," he mused, as the cab came up, "will simply be to step in, call that address, and then sit still. That is all I will have to do."

But, when the cab reached him, the thought of calling on any other woman was as repugnant to the *torero* as the coarse conversation in the dressing room had been. He stepped into the vehicle, gave his own address on Traposo Calle, and rode away. This struck Angelito as an extraordinary conclusion to his musings, and rather a distressful one.

"*Caramba!*" he thought. "How long am I to be deprived of all the natural pleasures of men, just because a *señorita* refused to toss back my cloak? Certainly I am as mad as a crab that runs backward from everything it sees!"

In this predicament he leaned forward impulsively and shared his trouble with the driver, as one peon confides in another.

"Brother," he shouted earnestly, above the rattle of the cobblestones, "a woman is a terrible thing!"

The cabman turned, looked down from his perch, and took an immediate and intimate interest in his fare.

"That is true, *señor*," he agreed earnestly. "Doesn't Pedro Ibana know that? A bad woman, *señor*, is a limb of Satan. Everything goes—a man's money, his health, his reputation, his peace of mind, his very soul! If there is a man in Caracas who knows that, *señor*, it is Pedro Ibana!"

"*Hombre!*" cried Angelito, leaning forward and holding to the top as the cab jounced over the cobbles. "What you say is true enough—a bad woman is the whip of the devil; but if you want to roast on

the very grid of hell, *Señor Ibana*, go to a good woman!"

*Señor Ibana* was amazed. He stared at his fare with his whip poised.

"A good woman, *señor?*"

"*Sí, señor*—a good woman! She spoils all a man's natural enjoyments, and furnishes none in return. You cannot leave her and forget her, as you would an ordinary baggage. *Dios in cielo*, you cannot do that, any more than you could turn away from the saints in paradise! Ah, *Señor Ibana*, I know of no sadder sight than to behold a man with all the simple pleasures of his life corrupted and vitiated by a good woman!"

Angelito made a hopeless gesture with his free hand, and sank back against the cushions of his bumping cab. Nevertheless, the driver had been a comfort to him, for the temperament of the *torero* was such that he had to talk to some one when he was troubled.

The cab stopped, delivered him to the emptiness of the blue *casa* on Traposo Calle, and he was alone again. For several minutes he stood at his doorway, looking at the opalescence of the mountains in the last of the sunlight; but it was a mechanical gazing toward a brilliant view, for he did not see it.

He hated going inside. He hated seeing his mother, who, he knew, would begin reviling the Jimenez family again. Heretofore he had defended them, but Socorro's deliberate insult would stop his mouth. He could only sit silent and hear the vitriolic old woman scold and scold.

He thought of the girl again—how she had reached out for his cloak, had caught it eagerly, and then had gone away and left it. Angelito could not understand these contradictory gestures. He did not attempt to understand them. Simply, they had happened. She had welcomed his cloak, and then had deserted it.

The *diestro* drew out his keys, unlocked the bronze grating of his door, and then opened the small inner panel, and let himself inside.

To Angelito, the whole interior of his *casa* was redolent of Socorro Jimenez. As he walked into the entry, it seemed to him that he might meet her coming out. In the *patio* it seemed certain that presently she would come out of the front room and pass among the twisted pink columns. The ornate columns suggested the warm loveli-



ness of the girl. They were two components of a whole, and Angelito could never see the one without recalling the other.

The bullfighter moved slowly down the *patio*, past his dining room, which had not been used since the evening of the banquet. He and his mother now ate their meals on a table in the kitchen, because the dining room table was occupied by the big chest of silver. Old Ana had repacked the whole set, wrapping each piece in its original tissue paper, and now the chest waited in a sort of indefinite suspense. Neither Angelito nor his mother quite knew whether it would eventually go back to the jeweler at a discount, or would be sold to some other buyer, or would remain in the blue *casa* as a nucleus of family plate, to admonish other lives in years to come with the brave legend, "To the Stars through Difficulties."

### SV

As Angelito's footfalls sounded through the *patio*, a door opened farther down, and old Ana hurried out of her room.

"*Gracias* to the saints, Pancho!" she cried. "You are not hurt! *Caramba*, I heard your footsteps coming so slow I thought you had been wounded. You gave me a turn, *mi hijo*!"

"No," said the *espada* briefly. "The *corrida* was dull, tame." He meant to stop with this information, but he could not help adding: "I saw the Jiminez family in the press box."

"You did? Is Señor Rafael able to be out so soon?"

"No—Rafael was not there."

The old peon woman appeared to be deeply shocked.

"*Cà!* These hard-hearted aristocrats! A mother and a sister go right off to a bullfight after their boy has been hurt in one!"

"Ah, *madre*, they needed the air. They have been bound hand and foot with Rafael for a long time."

"They could have taken it a little more decently than by going to a bullfight. I say it looks heartless." She paused in her carping to look sharply at her son. "I suppose you flung up your cloak to the Señorita Jiminez?"

"No, I didn't," denied Angelito, hoping to avoid a rehearsal of the whole event.

"You didn't? Well, I'm glad of it. To whom did you fling your cloak?"

Her astonishment admitted that the Jim-

inezes were the proper persons to receive this favor.

"To a—she was a stranger," hesitated the bullfighter.

But the way he said it told the old woman the truth.

"Ah, *pou!*" she shrugged. "You are always lying to me, Pancho!" She stood looking at him with reproachful eyes in her wrinkled old face, and added vindictively: "I wish you had not thrown your cloak to anybody. I wish you had just flung it down on the bench, and let it lie there. *Caramba*, those conceited Jiminezes!"

A hot flush swept over Angelito.

"*Diablo*, and so do I!" he flung out impulsively.

The old woman stared.

"So do you?"

"By the wounds of Christ," shouted Angelito, "I wish I had flung my cloak on the bench! I wish I had flung it in the dust!"

He made a furious gesture. His violence alarmed the old woman.

"Holy Virgin!" she cried with distended eyes. "*Mi hijo*, what has happened?" She stepped quickly to him, caught his arm, and peered anxiously into his face. "*Hijo mio*, what can have happened?"

The fighter's face darkened and his voice shook as he cried:

"A thousand devils, she flung it down! She flung it down in the ring there before all Caracas! She humbled me as if I had been a *monosabio*, as if I had been the very mule driver that hauls out the carrion!"

"*Dios*, have mercy!" gasped the crone, growing clay-colored at such an outrage.

"Such an insult was never borne before! God in heaven, if I were a peon, I would set their sugar field afire! I would hamstring their horses! God's lightning, I would poison their well!"

"Eh, eh, Pancho, my son, don't talk so loud!" warned the old woman fearfully. "*Caramba*, suppose some one should hear you!"

She glanced fearfully about the big empty *casa*, and then, for greater secrecy, drew her son toward her own poor room.

"But in God's name," she asked in a shaken voice, "why did she do it? Have you not treated her with every respect?"

"She simply wanted to humble me, to show me that I was nothing but a peon, that I was a madman to dream of looking at her. A thousand devils, I am mad!"



I'm mad, mad, *madre!* I see nothing but that girl! This *patio*, my *casa*, the whole city, is filled with her. I never look anywhere but I see her just about to come to me. I think, feel, hear nothing but her, and she flings my cloak in the dust!"

He was in his mother's room now, with its earthen floor and grass bed. He threw himself on the ancient mahogany frame, face down, with oaths and sobs tearing at his throat.

The old woman stood aghast at this paroxysm. Gradually she began weeping with anger herself. She walked shakily to her crucifix, which hung on the wall with a candle beneath it. With trembling fingers she struck a match and adjusted its flame to the wick of the candle. The old woman knelt and lifted her weeping, furious eyes to the image.

"Oh, *Cristo!*" she wavered. "Comfort me by destroying these aristocrats! Bring death and desolation to them! Pour your curses upon them! Let the girl Socorro be a barren, miserable woman, a loveless bride and a childless wife! Thou knowest the aristocrats did my husband to death, they sent my brother to the reds, they poured contempt on me, and now they despise my son. Curse them, San Pablo! Curse them, San Tomas! May their souls sink to—"

At this point in old Ana's malediction there came a clangor at the doorbell. Angelito sprang up from the straw mattress.

"*Madre!*" he gasped. "Hurry to the door! It must be the *señorita* come to tell me she did not mean it! Hurry! *Pronto! Pronto!*"

He was lifting her up from where she knelt.

"Pancho, are you crazy?" the old woman cried angrily.

"Ana," said the bullfighter, in a loud voice, to his mother in his arms, "go to the door and see who it is!"

The old woman shook herself free and looked sourly at her son, but she went out. Presently she called back from the entry that it was a mulatto girl with a note.

The bullfighter was not accustomed to notes. He came out somewhat curiously into the *patio*, and then recognized the Jimenez servant standing with his mother in the entry. Instantly he suspected that Socorro Jimenez had really sent him a note. It struck him that that would be what Socorro would do—write him a note, perhaps

an apology. His heart began to beat with a sudden happiness.

He went hurrying toward the entry, crying impatiently to his mother, who stood looking blankly at the note:

"Here, bring it here! Don't stand all day like that! What does it say?"

The servant girl turned to go.

"Hold on!" cried Angelito anxiously.

"It may need an answer. *Diablo*, some notes do! Wait a few minutes, and I will see if it needs an answer."

"My mistress said it didn't need an answer," said the girl, who still seemed on the verge of going.

"Your mistress?" echoed old Ana, in surprise.

Angelito's heart gave a double beat. He was right. It was a note from Socorro.

"Here, let me have it! Wait, *muchacha*, just a moment! Let me read it!"

He took the note from his mother and unfolded it with hurried fingers. A vague perfume arose. He read slowly, forming the words with his lips:

"To his excellency, Señor Gabrielo Angel—estimable *señor*," and so on.

As he read, an amazing light-heartedness filled him. He felt like dancing. He wanted to fling his arms about the mulatto girl and waltz in the entry.

"Tell your mistress I am coming right down to-night!" he cried gayly. "*Caramba*, to think she should write me a note! *Olà*, but it smells good!"

He put it to his nose and inhaled, then kissed it.

"*Si, señor*," nodded the girl, beginning to laugh.

"It smells like poetry!"

"Oh, *señora*, did you ever hear such a man?" cried the mulatto to Ana. "The *señorita*'s note smells like poetry!"

"He is hopelessly mad!" declared old Ana ill-temperedly.

"Were you at the bullfight this afternoon?" asked Angelito, with a desire to work off his ebullition by gossiping.

"*Si, señor*. I never miss a *circo* when you are in it."

"Is that true? You are flattering me. I only hope I will get into the big Spanish *corrida*."

"Oh, so do I, *señor!*" cried the girl fervently. "I would much rather see you fight than Juan Leon."

"You will have your jest!" exclaimed Angelito, flattered. "*Pues*, tell your mis-

truss I am coming down immediately, and I send her a thousand respects."

"I will, *señor*. *Adios, pues.*"

"*Adios, señorita.*"

The girl went out into the street. The bullfighter whirled, and flung an arm about his mother.

"There you are!" he cried gayly. "A note from a *señorita*! Ah, *madre*, I told you I was a *caballero*! A peon would hardly get this from a *señorita*!"

He swung the note playfully under her nose.

"But you are not going, Pancho?" she cried indignantly.

"*Seguramente*, I am going!"

"After she flung your cloak in the dust?"

The *torero* shrugged.

"*Cà!* She didn't exactly throw my cloak down in the dust."

"You said she did."

"That was just a way of speaking. What she really did was to go off and leave it hanging on her box." The *espada* made a slight gesture. "That was all—just left it hanging on the rail of her box."

"*Diablo*, that was all! Just left it hanging on the rail of her box! Wasn't that enough? Isn't it exactly the same as spitting on it? I am amazed at you, Pancho, to be ready to play the bear to a girl who has spit on your cloak, who has wounded your pride before all Caracas! *Caramba*, are you a dog or a man?"

"Now, *madre*," laughed Angelito, "if no man forgave his *querida* when she gave him the cold mutton, I'm thinking not many men and women would be on speaking terms."

"But, *mi hijo*," cried the old woman, exasperated, "this was such a shameless insult!"

"*Cà!*" The fighter rolled his head complacently. "When a woman wants to attract a man's attention, *madre*, she goes to extremes. It was her love—"

"*Huy! Huy!*" snapped the crone, completely out of temper. "What a fool! What a fool! Her love—it was her love! *Diablo*, she is without shame! A baggage who wants to show every one that she can play fast and loose with the finest sword in Caracas—humble you to the dust one minute, toss you to the sky the next! Pancho, you would sicken a buzzard!"

"La! La!" interrupted the son, with a good humor not to be dimmed. "I dare

say you made my father dance to a pretty tune before he brought you around—eh, *madre*? Every *señorita* puts a man through his paces, doesn't she? I'll venture, when you were a girl, you were driving men four in hand!"

The old woman blinked her eyes and grunted unintelligibly.

"I'll wager you were a regular devil among the boys. I always have thought it!" accused the *torero*, in high spirits.

"*Cà!*" admitted the old woman, at last. "I'm afraid I did nearly drive your poor father out of his wits, Pancho. And there were several other fine fellows, too."

"I don't doubt it! I don't doubt it!" cried the *torero*, laughing loudly.

The old crone tipped her head to one side, and her wrinkles took a humorous twist at the memory of some ancient caprice of her youth.

"Still, I never wrote a note to a young man asking him to come to see me, Pancho. I never did such a shameless thing in all my life."

The son ignored the fact that his mother never knew how to write.

"*Caramba, madre*, a girl with a face like yours wouldn't have to write to anybody, unless it was to ask the young men to leave her alone."

Old Ana cleared her throat.

"Now, Pancho, you are laughing and trying to make sport, but"—she cleared her throat again—"that was exactly the way it was!"

## XVI

IN a cab, on his way to Paraiso, the bullfighter drew out Socorro's note, touched it to his lips, inhaled its faint perfume, and reread it in the last light of day. It was unbelievable—a note from a *señorita* in Paraiso! A note from the silent, beautiful girl whose image still haunted his *casa*! And now he was on his way to her villa at her request.

The fact that she had dishonored his cloak in the *circo* only a few hours before had now no status in his mind. Most people can forgive wrongs, but only lovers can forgive and utterly forget.

Angelito had his guitar with him in the cab. He had brought it along when making a call as naturally as he took a rapier to the bull ring. It was his custom as a peon. Now the feel of it under his hand, the rumor of music aroused in its bell by

the jolting of the cab, evoked in the *torero* a mood of peculiar coloring which heightened his sense of triumph.

The faint sounds recalled his Matadero days, when he had used this same guitar before the barred windows of *muchachas* in the slaughterhouse slums. They were dragged, smelly purlieus. He had had to fight in those foul streets with other peon youths for the right to stand at the girls' windows. He recalled how he and his rivals butted with their heads, kicked with their feet and knees, and struck with the heels of their palms.

He recalled one fight vividly. His rival danced about in the dust, feinting this way and that with his head, his feet; but Angelito had leaped forward, his dirty head had crashed into the lad's belly, and down he went, while the winner kicked and stamped his prostrate foe. During this fight, the *muchacha* sat clutching the bars and peering out in silence.

Even now, as he refought this battle in the solitude of his cab, his heavy muscles tensed and flexed to the remembered action. In the midst of the conflict, he drew a deep breath of thankfulness.

"Pues, that was finished!"

Out of such obscene surroundings and feline courtships he had climbed to the decorum and amenities of Paraiso. He was a *caballero*. He would soon be in the presence of Socorro Jimenez. The thought sent a warm tingling through his whole body.

In the midst of this reverie his cab pulled up, and Angelito discovered that they had reached the tall iron fence of the Jimenez villa. He stepped out with the nimbleness of his profession. He had a feeling that he had ridden straight from his old Matadero days into Paraiso. He paid his fare. The driver turned his vehicle about and drove off.

Angelito walked slowly toward the Jimenez gate, holding his guitar by the neck. For the first time a doubt assailed him as to the propriety of the instrument. He was not sure that guitars were used by lovers in Paraiso. As he stood beside the iron gate, with its vertical bars reaching twice as high as his head, he touched the strings dubiously, sounding the strange, wailing harmonies in which the peons cast their music. The key was neither major nor minor, but a more melancholy sequence of intervals than either. Into this form had been poured the sorrows of the Venezuelan

peon, whom for six hundred years the Spanish enslaved, ravished, and betrayed.

Angelito stood picking these mournful chords, and the sound somewhat reassured him, for he opened the gate and passed into the Jimenez grounds. As he walked in, the view of the shadowy villa set up another question in his mind. The house was so large that he did not know at just what window he would find Socorro.

He did not even think of ringing the doorbell. He had always gone to the window of his *querida* with his guitar, and that was what a call meant to him; but this villa had so many windows that it seemed certain he could never find Socorro at all.

Instinctively he deserted the main path and moved diagonally across the lawn, scanning each window in its turn. In some of them the last amber of the west glimmered like miniature sunsets; others were already black with the coming darkness.

The shadowy lawn was sweet with evening fragrances, and the air was full of those endless insect noises which compose the silence of a tropical night. It was a curiously complex orchestration—the thin, monotonous chirping of crickets, the sudden arpeggio of cicadas, the bombilation of beetles, the dry shrill of some insect's tiny plectrum, and the birdlike *ko-keet, ko-keet*, of the tropical frogs.

Immediately in front of him, over an acanthus bush, Angelito saw two great white moths dancing around and around each other in the purple air. As each one circled near him, he could hear the furry whisper of its wings. Which pursued or which evaded in their tireless spiraling, he could not tell. For a moment he stood watching the airy lovers caught in the whirl of some unimaginable ecstasy.

On a leaf of the acanthus glimmered a glowworm, like some wise virgin with her tiny lamp, awaiting the coming of her groom. Compared to the man on the lawn and the girl in the villa, these insect lovers were sundered by enormous distances, and their modes of courtship were infinitely tedious and complex—the glow of the worm, the circling of the moths, the clashing of plectra, and the wail of tiny pipes.

As Angelito moved about the villa amid this frail and passionate orchestra, he heard the distant notes of a piano. The sound sent a quiver of relief through the bull-fighter's chest. He went quickly around the west wing of the villa, and presently,

in one of the windows, he saw a yellow glow. By moving around a flowering shrub, he saw, through the bars, a girl seated at a piano, with a floor lamp beside her.

The richness of the ensemble and the beauty of the girl struck Angelito like a strain of music. A hope that the girl would come to the window and talk to him seemed a dream of impossible happiness.

He hardly knew Socorro. He had been accustomed to the severe apron in which she had nursed her brother. Now the white gleam of her arm through her slashed sleeve, her hair in shining black cables, her filmy *décolleté* gown, the sweet, smooth line that curved from her chin to the dimple at the base of her throat—all this filled Angelito with a kind of despairing ecstasy. It seemed impossible that such a girl could be friendly toward him. She seemed too—expensive. She was obviously reared to become the wife of some extensively wealthy man.

The bullfighter drew in his breath to call her, but the presumption of announcing himself to such a creature silenced him. He stood looking at her silently through the bars, and presently he became aware of the music she was making.

Socorro Jimenez had begun to play a piano transcription of Rimski-Korsakov's "Hymn to the Sun," from "The Golden Cockerel." Angelito had not the faintest idea what the composition was; nor, indeed, had he ever heard its like before. He stood listening to the sad, wistful melody with its delicately repeated cadenzas, and it seemed to him as if it were the meditation of the girl herself, so pensive, so exquisite, so vaguely ironic.

He stood listening with a beating heart, and presently there formed in his mind a possible accompaniment to the delicately spun melody. Looking fixedly at the girl, after the manner of a peon musician, he swung his guitar across his body, and his left fingers set themselves to the frets, moving up and down the neck of the guitar, changing positions in silence, with the sharp attack of a skillful player. After some half dozen changes in this mute accompaniment, he caught the exotic motif of the hymn. Then, with his eyes fixed steadily on the softly lighted figure at the piano, he struck his strings, and there arose a surprising harmony woven around the piano score.

At his first notes the girl at the instru-

ment hesitated; but after a swift glance toward the window she continued playing, with the color mounting slowly to her face. Then, presently, it faded again, as she re-entered the spell of the great Russian.

The strange melody filled Angelito's head with a kind of swimming delight. His fingers flew over the frets, following some instinct of their own. They wove ornaments and grace notes into the filigree of the music.

With this accompaniment, the girl at the piano passed swiftly into a new brilliance and passion of playing. The broken, half ironical pathos of Korsakov's melody, the little wistful, questioning runs, the mournful solemnity of the bass, filled the salon and the darkening garden.

The pianist played on and on to the last liquid double cadenza, which cascaded from treble to bass, and the final queries, following one another softly and hopelessly, until the last question is left unfinished, its final note unsounded.

The belly of Angelito's guitar still vibrated under his fingers when he became aware that the girl had risen from the piano and was coming toward the window. She passed the lamp, and became a lovely silhouette against its glow. Presently she seated herself in the window, so near Angelito that he caught the faint sweetness of her corsage.

"That is you, Señor Angel, is it not?" she said.

The bullfighter was so shaken that he could hardly answer.

"Sí, señorita. I received your compassionate note, señorita."

"I did not know you played the guitar so beautifully. Where did you ever get a guitar transcription of the 'Hymn to the Sun'?"

Her voice was so inviting and lovely that Angelito felt an impulse to kneel before her, as he did to the saints in the cathedral.

"I never saw a transcription, señorita. Indeed, I know nothing about music. I play as I feel."

The girl peered at him attentively through the bars.

"Señor, it is amazing, to follow such an intricate composition!"

Socorro's admiration loosed some of the endless soliloquies Angelito had spun about the girl.

"Señorita," he said intensely, "if I play at all acceptably, I owe it to you. Never



before in all my life have I heard such sweetness as the air you played. It was like my thoughts of you, *señorita*—a kind of honeyed aching, a grieving for some celestial happiness that can never come in this life—at least, not to so humble a man as myself.”

“*De verdad, señor!*” exclaimed the girl. “I thought you were a *torero*—I did not know you were also a musician and a poet!”

“I am merely a man who reads a poem, *señorita*. No man can look at you and not read a poem. If it did not come to his lips, it would rest in his heart.”

“You are without shame,” murmured the girl—“a sad flatterer and philanderer!”

The bullfighter stood gripping the bronze grille with both hands. He could hear the blood in his ears. He could see the pale blur of Socorro's fingers around one of the window bars, and instinctively he bent his lips to touch it.

“One does not flatter the moon by calling it lovely, *señorita*, nor the sun by declaring it bright. Although you never spoke to me in my *casa*, *señorita*, my heart danced to know you were there. When I played at dominoes in the cafés, I would suddenly think, ‘I can go home and see her now!’ It was like the sudden song of a bird.”

Now an American girl would have seen in such hyperboles, and in this kissing of fingers, the sure signals of insincerity, for in the high latitudes passion is dumb, and its manifestations are rough; but the Latin, when aroused, boils into dithyrambs and florid gestures. A Spanish-American girl is as deeply moved by the fevered eloquence and deferential kisses of her lover as a North American girl would be by the most dangerous choking and sputtering. Socorro Jimenez was not disgusted with the bullfighter's inflated rhetoric. On the contrary, she was moved, and began to explain why she had remained so silent and distant during her stay at the blue *casa*.

“It was because I misunderstood you, *señor*,” she said in an unsteady voice. “I have been sorry for it ever since. I thought you were the principal cause of Rafael's going to Valencia and getting wounded. I did not know, *señor*, I had no idea, that it was you who saved his life at the risk of your own!”

“*Caramba!*” cried the bullfighter. “Think of all the lovely hours we wasted

just because you did not know that one little thing!”

His regret was so naïve that Socorro broke out laughing, and reached a hand through the bars to pat his arm.

“Anyhow, we know it now, *señor*, and the world is not ended yet!”

The bullfighter caught and kissed her hand again. The faint perfume of it set him trembling.

This second kiss ended that part of the interview rather abruptly, for she rose from the window seat, withdrew her hand, and said:

“Now you must go in and see Rafael. I know you are wanting to see him.”

The bullfighter, at that moment, wanted to see Rafael about as much as he wanted to see a devil out of hell. From head to foot he vibrated like a harp string. He listened as Socorro directed him around to a side door, where she would admit him. Then she left the music room.

The night seemed to swing softly above Angelito. A quarter moon was in the sky, lodged, apparently, among the dark branches of a mamon tree. In its glimmer the white moths still whirled in their dance above the acanthus bush.

It seemed to Angelito that the glamour of the night somehow cut him off from Socorro. The very moonlight was a sort of pale, impalpable wall barring him from her. Hemmed in, as it were, by a moving prison, he walked to the side door. He knew that in a few moments he would be inside the house, talking to Rafael, and also, no doubt, to the coldly polite *señora*. Socorro would be lost to him in the vacuity of formal conversation.

Rather unexpectedly, the door opened, and the girl stepped out beside him for an instant. She paused to draw a breath of the perfume.

“It's a sweet night, *señor*,” she said.

Angelito sought to delay her.

“You have so many flowers here, *señorita*, it is like the fields of flowers the peons grow up in the mountains.”

“Yes—I have seen them. They are very beautiful.”

“And they grow the rarest varieties,” the bullfighter wandered on, hardly knowing what he said. “Lilies and orchids—”

“If you are interested in orchids,” exclaimed Socorro impulsively, “we have a very rare one out there in the garden, *Señor Angel*. It is one Rafael found up in the

Goajira country. It is pale blue, and fragrant only at night."

The implication that she was about to show him an orchid in the garden flowed through the *torero* with a sensation of warm wine being poured into his veins. He said in an unsteady voice that he wished above all things to see the orchid.

She took his arm, and together they turned out into the moonlight.

The extreme unconventionality of such a walk seized and shook Angelito. At every step he trembled lest the girl should turn and go back. Then, as she went on, he began to realize that she was as deeply moved as he himself. It seemed impossible. How could a *señorita* so finished, so exquisite, be stirred by him?

He heard her give a little intake of breath.

"What is it, *señorita*?"

He trembled, terrified lest repentance had set in. She gave a little nervous laugh.

"*Señor*, your arm might be a bronze arm off a statue."

He felt the faint pressure of her fingers on his biceps.

"That came from fighting, *señorita*," he said huskily.

"You must be terribly strong!"

The bullfighter made a deprecatory movement of his hand, which caused his arm to swell and relapse under her finger tips.

After a little pause she said:

"You made me very happy this afternoon, *señor*, throwing your cloak to me in the arena."

A reminiscent pain arose in the bullfighter's heart.

"I thought I would find you there when I came back after it, *señorita*."

The girl gave a gasp and looked at him, her eyes two dark spots in the moonlight.

"Oh, I went off and left your coat on the balustrade!"

Angelito made a gesture.

"It was nothing, *señorita*."

"But it *was* something—it was indeed! Did you get it back?"

The *torero* tried to dismiss the topic.

"A man threw it to me."

"A man! What must the man have thought?"

"I don't know, *señorita*—nothing, perhaps. It was such a trifle."

The girl pressed his arm to accent her point.

"But it was not a trifle! It was rude. I—we—we had some trouble in our box, *señor*—a little accident. That's why I left the cloak."

"Did it happen to you?" asked the *torero*, in the exaggerated alarm of lovers.

"Pues—yes."

"What could it have been?"

The girl hesitated.

"Just a trifle. I—I grew ill. I'm afraid I fainted."

For some reason Angelito's heart began beating at this confession. Her weakness appealed to his immense strength. Impulsively he put his hand on her arm, as if to give her some kind of retroactive support.

"But how came you to faint, *señorita*?" he asked anxiously. "Were you ill?"

This man's concern for her moved Socorro in the most intimate fashion. She had not meant to tell him why she fainted, and yet it became utterly impossible not to do so. His hand on her arm seemed to be softly melting something within her.

"I—I hardly know, *señor*," she hesitated. "I saw you standing alone in the arena. I—I thought how Rafael had been gored, and somehow I fainted."

"Oh, on account of Rafael!"

Socorro wanted to let that go, but it seemed as if she were practicing some monstrous deception on him. Her bosom lifted and fell. She was trembling all over.

"No, *señor*," she whispered. "I was afraid you would be gored."

"Me?"

She nodded mutely. She seemed about to fall.

"You fainted on my account?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" she breathed, letting herself go into his groping arms, resting her devastating weakness on his powerful muscles. Her senses were in confusion. She instinctively resisted his hand, which he slipped under her chin to turn her face to his.

"No, don't—don't do that!" she gasped.

She was supported by his arms, and by leaning against his body. She did not know why she wanted to delay or refuse his kiss.

Angelito held her as carefully as if a priest had intrusted him with the holy chrism. She was slighter than he had thought, and amazingly soft. He had never before placed a hand on a girl bred and reared for the express purpose of becoming the wife of a wealthy man.

The peon women, of whom he had known

enough, were tough and rubbery. Socorro was as surprising as his first draft of absinth. He wanted to pick her up bodily, to press her against his breast, but he was exceedingly careful of her, and a little afraid lest he might somehow hurt her exquisite delicateness.

There was a stone bench near them, and they got to it. As he sat holding her, it was all a blank mystery to him. He could not understand her amazing capitulation. She was obviously a *señorita*, a carefully guarded and perfectly innocent girl. He did not understand the persuasiveness of his weeks of mute wooing in his own *casa*, the pathos of his unfortunate dinner, the romantic force of the dangers he met in the arena.

After an uncertain interval, they began whispering about the last subject which had engaged their thoughts—Socorro's fainting at the Nuevo Circo. She had never done such a thing before. She supposed that this must be love, but it was not what she had expected. What she had expected she hardly knew, but something different, in some way.

As she murmured these things, her head rested on his chest, and she could hear his heart whispering in her ear. Her eyes fixed themselves on the crescent moon hung in the mamon tree. It seemed as if all anxiety and suspense and weariness had been drawn out of her mind and body forever. She had never experienced so profound a rest.

Presently Angelito leaned down and kissed her, but it scarcely rippled her crystalline mood, his caress seemed so normal.

Socorro had a curious impression that somehow the man and the night had changed places. It had seemed at first that Angelito was her lover, and the night a sweet and ambient setting. Now Angelito's arms and body were the setting which enabled Socorro to see, for the first time in her life, how sweet and beautiful was the tropical night.

Heretofore the beauty of the night had filled her with a sort of wistful sweetness. Now its light and perfume showered upon her in a sort of fulfilled sweetness. For this hour she and Angelito and the ancient night existed.

## XVII

THE girl felt the bullfighter move and then lift her gently to one side. A sharp

sense of alarm went through her. She became aware of two dark figures standing within a few yards of the bench. She gave a little gasp as she stared at them. She stopped a scream in her throat. She had a convulsive impulse to run. One of the figures was her brother; the other—the smaller of the two—was Señor Montauban.

She had a sensation as if she were sinking through space. She fell and fell and fell. The two figures sank with her. She felt hot, then intensely cold.

She saw Angelito get up and advance toward the two men. Something in his walk gave her a terrible fear that he would attack the two men, perhaps would kill them.

She heard Rafael's voice, amazed and bewildered:

"Socorro—sister—is that you?"

Señor Montauban immediately interrupted in a strained tone:

"A lovely night, *señorita*!"

Socorro made an effort to speak, and heard a strange voice saying for her:

"I brought Señor Angel out here to see that blue orchid."

Angelito, from his experience in Matedero courtships, was expecting every moment a personal assault from the editor. Now he began to perceive that none was coming. He wondered if it were possible that the two men had not seen him sitting with Socorro in his arms, but the tone of their voices denied this merciful possibility.

He turned to Socorro, and included the whole company.

"Shall we go into the house, *señorita*? I wish to pay my respects to the Señora Jiménez."

But no sooner had he mentioned the *señora* than he realized that of all persons he most dreaded meeting her.

"I am sorry I can't go with you," said the editor, in his strained manner. "I was just going. I will say good night."

He bowed, and all the other three repeated his good night in unnatural voices. He turned toward the gate, and was lost in the veil of moonlight.

As Rafael turned once more toward the house, he said in his strange voice:

"Narciso and I were growing uneasy about you, Socorro. We heard you go out into the garden some time ago. It was growing late."

Angelito was becoming more terrified every moment at the prospect of meeting the *señora*. He seized on this as an excuse.



"Perhaps I'd better wait till later to see the *señora*," he said.

Socorro gripped his arm.

"Don't leave me!" she whispered desperately, but the very next moment she went on: "Yes, yes, *madre de Dios*, go at once!"

Rafael, who had started to enter by the side door, turned back at Angelito's suggestion.

"No—come on in, *señor*," he insisted, with a certain determination in his tone. "My mother will want to see you, and no doubt you will want to say something concerning my sister."

"Oh, Rafael!" gasped Socorro, and suddenly dropped the *torero's* arm.

Angelito felt as if unknown depths were opening beneath his feet.

"Your sister," he repeated vacantly.

He dimly realized that he would have to make a declaration to the mother, asking for Socorro in marriage. Rafael stood holding the door open for the two to enter.

As Angelito walked toward the drawing-room, he realized the futility of possessing such muscles as his amid polite society. It profited him nothing to be strong enough to toss Rafael out of the house and to bind the women with one hand. It had even been out of the question to assault Señor Montauban in the garden, although the idea did pass through his head.

Rafael limped slowly through a corridor and across a *patio* to a lighted room. Angelito and Socorro followed. There was nothing that the bullfighter could do to soften or forestall the coming interview.

Rafael opened a door and stood aside to admit his two companions, not to say prisoners, into a large room filled with a rose-colored light. The Señora Jimenez was at a table, placidly weaving lace on a pillow stuck full of pins. On the other side Margarita Miraflores crocheted so rapidly that her needle was a blur of flashes.

At the entrance of the party, both ladies looked up. At the sight of Angelito, they stopped work in surprise.

"It's Señor Angel!" cried Margarita, jumping up. "How kind of you to come to see us!"

The *señora* was cooler.

"Won't you have a seat, Señor Angel?" she invited, staring at him in surprise.

Rafael cleared his throat.

"Angelito—I mean Señor Angel—desires to present his respects to you, *mam-*

*an*," said the young man of the house, with preternatural seriousness; "and he would like to speak to you concerning Socorro."

The *señora's* surprise grew into extreme amazement.

"Socorro! He—he would like to speak to me about Socorro! What is there that he can say about Socorro?"

"*Pues*, there are not a great many topics on which a young man can speak to a mother about her daughter," returned Rafael dryly.

The *señora* looked about the group.

"Rafael, are you insane? Socorro, what is your brother saying?"

For the first time she looked at Socorro, and the girl's face frightened her.

"*Mi hija!*" she cried. "Are you ill? How white you look! What does this mean, Señor Angelito? What can it possibly be that you want to say to me?"

Angelito moistened his lips nervously and stammered:

"I—I want to ask your permission to—to pay my addresses to your daughter."

"Your addresses! *Addresses!* A bullfighter pay his addresses to my daughter!" She had grown as pale as the girl. "*Señor*, I do not wish to appear rude under my own roof, but you must realize that this is effrontery. It is—"

"*Madre*," interposed Rafael quickly, "I must tell you that Socorro has already dismissed Narciso's suit in favor of Señor Angel."

"Socorro! Am I going demented? You dismissed Narciso—Narciso Montauban?"

"Only five minutes ago, *madre*. Narciso and I found them seated in the garden together, on the stone bench."

"Alone?"

Rafael made a gesture.

"*Dios in cielo!*" gasped the matron. "Has Socorro disgraced herself—at her age?" She turned furiously on the bullfighter. "You serpent! You intriguing peon butcher! Leave my house! Go!"

She gave Angelito the impression that she was about to annihilate him through mere spiritual wrath.

Margarita stared at her friend, gasping vacantly.

"Socorro! No—this is impossible!" she cried.

Rafael made a harassed gesture.

"*Caramba*, don't be gasping and insulting every one like that, *maman!* This is a condition to be faced, not something to ex-



claim over. I tell you Narciso Montauban has gone."

Margarita spoke again.

"Socorro! To throw over the whole Montauban estate!"

"The question is," pressed Rafael, in polite exasperation, "shall we accept Señor Angel in Narciso's stead? At present no one knows of Socorro's indiscretion in the garden, except Narciso and Angelito and ourselves."

"*Por favor de Cristo, Rafael!*" cried the *señora*. "Don't be calling him 'Señor Angelito.' Call him by his proper name, Señor Angel."

"Señor Angel? His name is not Señor Angel!"

"In the name of Heaven, what is it, then? Narciso said it was."

"I—don't know," said Rafael blankly.

"What is it, *hombre?*" demanded the *señora*, turning fiercely on the fighter. "What is your name?"

Her attack was so abrupt that the *torero* had a dazzled sensation, as if some one had struck him in the face. He was forced to answer immediately, without a moment's forecast of the consequences.

"I am Pancho Pachecho, *señora*," he stammered hurriedly.

"Pancho Pachecho!"

"*Si, señora*," he answered in an apprehensive tone.

"Pancho Pachecho!" Suddenly she began to laugh. "A Jimenez marrying a Pachecho!" She broke into a rage of laughter. "*Mi hija*, do you hear that? A *bríbon* named Pancho Pachecho is asking me for your hand!"

"*Caramba*, that's nothing to have hysterics over, *madre!*" cried Rafael. "I could have told you it was something like that. The man naturally has a name!" He turned to Angelito. "Señor Pachecho, you see my mother is overwrought. I will call at your *casa* in the morning with her answer to your request. Until then I wish you *adios*."

He bowed as gracefully as his lame leg would permit. Angelito returned the courtesy, and then, glancing anxiously at Socorro, he said:

"*Señora, señoritas*, good night."

Socorro's lips made a movement of farewell in her perfectly white face.

A thought came to Angelito that he was now seeing his last of the girl he loved. With all his strength and suppleness, there

was no way in which he could brush this angry family away and take her. They had him bound and trussed with the invisible thongs of social custom. His huge strength was no match for them at all.

As he crossed the *patio*, and went out of the side entrance, he realized that he had lost her.

## XVIII

WHEN her lover had well departed, Socorro walked over to a sofa, sat down on it, and said:

"Now—begin!"

"Socorro, what can you see in that hulking creature? A bullfighter, a peon tossed up by the *circo*! How could you, how could we, have the effrontery to announce such an engagement to our friends here in Caracas?"

"But, *maman*," interposed Rafael, "that is not the question now. Remember that Socorro was sitting in the garden with him, alone, at midnight!"

"But, Rafael, no one knows it but us and Narciso," Margarita interrupted.

"Doesn't that villainous bullfighter know it?" cried the *señora*. "Do you imagine he will fail to spread news of his conquest in the wine shops?"

"Oh, *madre!*" cried Socorro, with a sick face.

"He will, of course he will!" insisted the *señora*, amazed at her daughter's belief in her lover. "Socorro, you don't know such creatures. They don't understand—they simply do not understand the code of aristocrats. I don't doubt that at this moment he is telling some brother peon of sitting in a garden with a *señorita*. Is that all you did—just sit there with him?" She turned quickly to her son. "Was that all she did, Rafael?"

"Oh, *maman*, you were a girl once! You know about how a girl in love acts."

"Socorro!" cried the distracted mother. "How could you be so shameless? You are as bad as the North American *señoritas* who permit—anything!"

"Socorro, you might at least have stayed behind your bars," reproached Margarita, in a tone which suggested that much could be accomplished, even behind bars.

"Yes," declared Rafael, in a dry voice, "you might surely have stayed behind your bars, Socorro. Innocence is a technical matter, and should be observed like the eating of fish on Friday."

Señora Jimenez looked at her son.

"Rafael, I hope you don't mean that you are condoning your sister's conduct?"

"Cà! It has its other side, *maman*. Everything has its other side."

"Other side! What other sides are there but shamelessness, disgracefulness, and scandal? There'll be oceans of gossip about this, Socorro—you may rest sure of that!"

Socorro made no reply, but sat looking anxiously at her brother. Rafael hesitated at being thus appealed to. Possibly he might not have entered the lists at all, had not Socorro spoken for his patronage. He cleared his throat.

"After all, *maman*," he said, "Socorro has a certain—well, a certain justification, when one comes really to look at it."

The mother at once turned her attention to Rafael.

"A certain justification?" she repeated, amazed.

"Yes, her action shows, I think I may say, a certain return to fundamentals."

Margarita was staring at him.

"Rafael, what are you talking about?"

"I am talking about Socorro and Señor Angelito. To me, their sudden and passionate attraction for each other has in it something fundamentally healthful, and I may even say beautiful."

"Rafael," frowned his mother, "surely you are not going to fling out any ill timed philosophy, when your sister's honor is in question and your family is in trouble? This is no time for philosophy!"

The young man hesitated. Margarita cried out:

"Let him go on, just to see what he will say!"

Came a little hesitation, and Rafael again caught Socorro's eye.

"It's just this," he began self-consciously, since his remarks were clearly to be taken as an exhibition of fantastic nonsense. "It's just this. I wanted to say—er—that all aristocracies are eventually refined away to impotence." He collected what he had thought on the subject by main force of memory. "They breed along one strain—aristocracies do, I mean—until that strain becomes so exaggerated that it can no longer withstand the shocks of existence. An aristocracy, such as ours, becomes overcerebrated, has too much nerves and too little brawn, too much convention and not enough impulse. This—er—this

affair of Socorro's is her natural impulse to return to first principles. Her children will be—er—stronger and in better equilibrium for it, and I honor her for it."

Margarita and the *señora* listened to this salmagundi of big words without any patience at all.

"You mean that you honor Socorro for dishonoring herself?"

"I think, *maman*, that when her love impulse is strong enough to make her overstep our conventions, it is a very hopeful sign," returned the poet brusquely.

"Why, that's absurd and irrelevant!" cried the mother. "You make a virtue of wrongdoing!"

"Wrongdoing!" cried Rafael. "Wrong is what reduces one's chances of perpetuating one's self, and right is what forwards those ends. Now, in this instance—"

"Rafael," cried his mother, "I am ashamed of you talking such nonsense and wickedness in this hour of trouble!"

"Cà! There is really no use discussing it. Let's drop it. The only question is, what is the best thing to do under the circumstances? Socorro was seen sitting in the garden with Angelito. All there is left for us to do is to accept the fellow, and have the banns published."

Señora Jimenez suddenly began weeping.

"Sacred Virgin, that is the only sensible thing you have said! It is too true—Socorro has disgraced herself. She will have to say many a prayer for this! To have my family disgraced by such a marriage!"

The *señora* sat down by the table, sobbing helplessly, and dabbed at her eyes with her handkerchief.

Margarita went over to her future mother-in-law, and took her hands, sniffing back her own sobs.

"M-margarita," gasped the *señora*, "I don't suppose you will w-want to enter a disgraced family, es-pecially when y-your future husband holds such wicked and irreligious views!"

"Oh, th-they aren't Rafael's v-views," sobbed Margarita. "H-he d-doesn't bubblelieve what he says. I don't think he knows what he believes!"

Here she joined her mother-in-law in sobbing outright.

"That is very charitable, Margarita," murmured the *señora*, pressing her daughter-in-law's hands.

Rafael heard himself classified as a moron and forgiven by Margarita. He

shrugged faintly, and glanced at his sister. Socorro's expression seemed to show disappointment. He shrugged again privately, to himself. Finally he said:

"Pues, what shall I tell this Señor Pacheco to-morrow—that it's all right?"

"If you do," choked the *señora*, "it will be on your own responsibility as the head of this house. I will have nothing whatever to do with it!"

This, of course, meant that the *señora* was giving her consent. The poet limped to his mother's side and patted her cheek.

"After all, *maman*," he said gently, "this won't work out so badly. If you and Margarita could see the matter from my

point of view, it might make you feel more comfortable."

As the young man drew away from them, Margarita reached up and let her hands drag down his arms.

"Good night, Rafael!" she said wistfully.

"Good night," returned the poet.

As he went out of the door into the *patio*, toward his own room, he heard his mother begin again.

"Socorro, I simply cannot see what you find in such a creature! Why, he doesn't look like a man—he looks like a sort of bull, as if he had taken his figure from the animals he butchers!"

(To be continued in the March number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

### THE GARDEN OF SLEEP

IN an old book I read far through the night,  
Then blew my candle out, for morn was near,  
And slept and dreamed a dream of strange delight—  
That in a garden I walked with her most dear,  
And she was young again, and I was young,  
And the old flowers were there, and the birds we knew  
Sang the old happy, unforgotten song,  
And all the long-lost joy was fresh with dew,  
As ever we said to each other, "I and you."

Her little gown of dimity she wore,  
With tiny sprigs of jasmine patterned quaint;  
And oh, she seemed—so bright a light did pour  
From her pure brows—sweet shining as some saint  
That bends above a young knight at his prayers.  
The fragrance of immortal presences  
Streamed from her sweeter than the garden airs,  
Or any nard or earthly essences,  
As we walked on amid the blossoming trees.

Oh, blessed power of sleep to immortalize,  
As in a magic glass, the things that were  
Fadeless in bloom for closed, unquestioning eyes  
That still may see old fairness ever fair,  
Young dawns that never on to noontide drew,  
But kept forever their enchanted morn,  
New moons in the high pine tops ever new,  
Love in the holy hush when it was born  
Forever tranced, and laughing time to scorn!

What though the day brings back a moaning wind  
Within the heart, and shows the years grown gray,  
And wakened eyes perceive how lone and thinned  
The garden boughs, and all things fled away  
That were so near and warm a moment's space;  
What though that little gown of dimity  
Is dust, and dust forever is that face,  
And we have lost our garden, I and she—  
While sleep to that lost garden holds the key?

Richard Le Gallienne

# The Little Green Model

## THE TRUTH ABOUT CERTAIN SCANDALOUS PROCEEDINGS AT LACUS COLLEGE

By Dawn Powell

IT was Kay Fielding's ingenuous habit to doze gently throughout Psychology Four. Even though it was the last class on the afternoon of the Junior Promenade, she was not sufficiently excited to alter her napping hour.

She lounged dreamily in a chair at the back of the room, where the drifting afternoon sunshine made of her sandy hair a mop of beauty, and gave a wistful charm to her gallant little mouth and her small, inquiring face. She was absorbed in some far-off planet while here about her burned one of the big, vital discussions that Miss Blythe loved to stage in order to "draw the girls out."

"Yes, the morality of falsehood." Miss Blythe's cheery voice filtered disagreeably through Kay's trance. "Now, Miss Terrell, just what do we mean by a falsehood?"

Miss Terrell, who always led the honor roll at the end of the year by being an Eager Eye, sparkled with sweet intensity into the professor's eyes. Kay looked away, but she knew that Miss Terrell was sitting on the edge of her seat, vibrating with thrills over the lecture. All through the period, Kay felt sure, she had been writing frantically in her notebook.

It was generally understood among the faculty that copious note taking showed the true scholarly nature, and incidentally betrayed a flattering confidence in the teacher's wisdom. Miss Terrell, therefore, took voluminous notes; and when the professor repeated some phrase, she smiled knowingly and carefully underlined said phrase in her notebook. She had smiled sympathetically with the teacher when some student had missed a nuance, and now and then she had gently interpolated:

"I think, Miss Blythe, that what Miss Jones means to say is—"

Kay had never seen an Eager Eye, and, as a consequence, she usually carried a subject from one year to the next. She had often felt that if she had been allowed to choose her own subjects, she might have distinguished herself academically; but Lacus College had the customary institutional policy of keeping the student as far as possible from the courses in which he might have a natural interest.

Miss Terrell, as Kay might have guessed, gave every indication of struggling with a thought too vast for expression.

"I think"—she finally uttered gropingly, and hesitated. "Why, I think—it seems to me that a falsehood is—at least, it seems so to me—practically the same thing as telling a lie."

"Ye-es," said Miss Blythe appreciatively, but determined to get the full value from the word. "What does it seem to you, Miss Freese?"

"I don't know just how to express it," Miss Freese contributed winningly; "but I feel that a person could hardly tell a lie without being insincere, if you know what I mean."

"Exactly," nodded Miss Blythe, with an air of really getting somewhere. "Now, Miss Freese, is a lie ever justifiable?"

"It would depend"—cunningly—"on the circumstances."

"Well, now, supposing a murderer came along and asked you which way his victim had gone, and you knew, should you tell him the truth? What do you think, Miss Fielding?"

"Blah, blah," answered Kay, still in a trance.

"Miss Fielding?"

"I said," said Kay, "that I certainly would."

The bell rang for the close of the period,



and Kay seized her untidy and barren notes and ran out before the professor could pursue the fascinating subject further. Miss Blythe's gaze followed the fleeing student with thoughtful suspicion, so that she neglected to heed the shy question concerning falsehood which Miss Terrell had paused to ask personally.

Kay hurried to the elevator with the out-pouring groups from the other classrooms. Lora Duffield, another self-supporting student, was running the elevator. She showed Kay, with a grimace, the bleeding cuts on her hand where the elevator rope—it was an old hydraulic car—had bruised her palm. The car filled with noisy girls, and started downward.

"Scourge is looking for you," hissed Lora in Kay's ear. At the same time she stopped the car at the third floor to scream out: "Third floor—ladies' underwear, Panama hats, rubber heels, and gentlemen's handkerchiefs with the initial I! Going down!"

"The Scourge," calmly answered Kay, turning her freckled snub nose loftily skyward, "gives me a pain. Got a man for prom, Lora?"

"Miss Gage got me the Town Boy," grinned Lora.

She referred to a fat bachelor who seemed to be the only eligible man the town had produced for a decade, and who had received a classification all his own.

At the street floor the girls poured out. Kay hurried over to the dormitory, trying to put her thoughts on anything but the Junior Promenade. To think of prom made her head throb with indignation, for she was the only girl in the class who could not go, and all because of the Scourge.

She tried to summon a smile at the thought of how the seniors, for whom the whole college had a profound contempt, would behave at prom. It was a poor attempt, however, and she was suffused with self-pity and her own small tragedy until she reached her room. Claire Paige, her roommate, and Tacky Freese were there, getting their gowns in readiness, for in another two hours the men would begin to arrive.

"Kay, what do you think?" greeted Claire, pink and excited over the business of being junior president and in charge of the great man-event of the year. "The seniors have been all dressed since lunch, and have gathered in their classroom to

sing the dear 'Alma Mater.' Wouldn't that sicken you?"

"The grand old seniors!" jeered Kay. "If that isn't just like them! They belong to another age, Claire. I'll bet they're up there now telling one another that it ain't so much the diploma—it's the associations you form."

Which was probably very near the truth. The graduating class belonged to an old régime, and was as unpopular as any that had ever been sent into the great world from Lacus College. They had preserved the antique custom of singing college songs in a deep, full, resonant manner, instead of humming or mumbling the things as they should be done. They had class parties. They abounded with class spirit, college spirit, Drama Club spirit, Shakespeare Club spirit, and other spirits of an aggravating nature.

"Only four of them had men they could ask to prom," sneered Claire, delicately "bobbing her eyebrows," as it was called, before the mirror. "The rest came to me and hired their escorts, or else asked their own brothers."

She flipped the tweezers back into the drawer.

"I'd like to know," meditated Kay, "just what your men friends would say if they knew the graft you work with them. I see the thing in the women's magazines—'How One Girl Put Herself Through College by Renting Her Men Friends to Friendless Classmates.'"

"I've made quite a bit," admitted Claire shamelessly. "Dad would have a fit if he knew—that is, unless it struck him in the right mood."

Tacky Freese sat at the foot of the bed on which Kay had thrown herself, and manicured her nails passionately.

"What are you going to wear, Kay? Some little Jenny number?"

"I'm not going," answered Kay. "The only thing I've got to wear is a dainty little dimity shirt waist and a white linen skirt, and they're dirty. In fact, they've been dirty ever since freshman year, when I wore them at the May festival."

"Kay, you've got to come," Claire implored, now engaged with her brown, wavy hair. "You're the most important person there. Tacky, she had the loveliest toasts made up. The dean said the junior president ought to do them, but you know I can't, so I told her it was an old tradition

in the college that the junior president's roommate should be toastmistress. It worked, too. You know how scared she is of upsetting our traditions."

"Well, why isn't Kay going to prom?" pursued Tacky, looking from one to the other.

"It's the Scourge," gloomily explained Kay, adjusting the cushions behind her. "She told me I was never to borrow clothes from any one again. She said it was a vile, vulgar habit, and quite worthy of me, but if I did it again she'd write my folks and have me expelled. That was after she met me on the way to that Phi Gam house party in town, wearing Claire's gray suit. Of course, I had planned to wear Claire's yellow taffeta, and Claire had got me a man and everything."

"I might have known the Scourge was at the bottom of it!" growled Tacky, frowning over an infinitesimal speck on her thumb nail. "It's a wonder she didn't make you wear one of her little models—the green velvet one, for instance."

The Scourge, whose real name was Miss Ellen Thomas, was famous for a complete wardrobe of 1890 costumes, which she wore with as much of an air as if they had been hot from Hickson's, as Kay put it. It was a tradition of the place that in the spring of 1911 the Scourge had purchased a linen suit of that period, but had only worn it once, doubtless saving it for the latter part of the century. For the most part she wore bell-shaped sleeves, tight bodices, high collars, and voluminous circular skirts.

She was sister to the former president of the board of trustees, and on the strength of that she had bullied the faculty, the students, the president, the dean, and even the janitor, for thirty years. Indeed, the old dean had left on her account, and the new one—a fragile, adorable little thing called Miss Greenleaf—was intimidated by her airs. The Scourge was still a factor in the Science Department, and it was Kay's painful duty, as a self-supporting student, to help her in the laboratory for four hours every day.

"Not the green velvet one, Tacky," answered Kay. "I couldn't endure that. It has too many depressing associations."

From the floor above familiar strains were gently borne abroad:

"Faithful, loyal, true—stately paths—fondest memories—Alma Mater dear—ivy-covered—faithful, loyal, true will be—"

Kay snorted.

"Hokum!" she announced, and jumped to her feet.

"Where to?" queried Claire, biting a thread.

"Got to clean up some test tubes and feed the frogs and chameleons and other museum pieces," answered Kay. "That's one thing about me, girls—I do love my work. One of these days I'm going to dynamite the science works, and the Scourge may be missed. I'll be back in time to sew you in, Claire. If my man arrives before Margie finds out she's to take him, you break the news to both of them."

"Kay, you'll do something about the toasts, won't you?" pleaded Claire. "Make notes on a handkerchief, and give it to Tacky."

Kay nodded and went out. In the hall underclassmen clustered in ecstatic anticipation of the great event of the year.

"Miss Fielding isn't even bathed," she heard an awed freshman whisper. "All the seniors have been ready all day!"

KAY told herself that it wasn't going to be very nice sticking in the dormitory all evening, while everybody else was over in Recreation Hall, dancing. Claire had furnished her with a very dashing man from her Princeton group. He thought he was going to take Claire. In fact, all of Claire's men thought that; but Claire always prettily disillusioned them when they arrived.

Kay opened the front door, but started back to make way for a beaming, brown-faced young man in tweeds, who was just entering. He swept off his hat. On seeing his sleek black hair, Kay gasped bewilderedly. She knew this man, she was positive, and yet—

"Fitzy!" she ejaculated delightedly, and fairly hugged him in her excitement. "Where did you come from? And did you get through your bar examinations?"

There was a shade of startled wonder in the young man's face, but Kay did not note it till afterward.

"Perfect!" he said. "And how—er—is everything all right?"

"Oh, tell me, are you going to take that New York offer, or practice in your home town?"

"New York," answered Fitzy, never taking his puzzled eyes from Kay's small, freckled face.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Kay. "Do you know I didn't hear that you were coming to prom?"

"Prom? Good Lord, is this prom week?"

Fitzzy stared distressfully at Kay. Just then Kay saw the Scourge beckoning to her from the steps of the Science Building, and she fled, with a jolly smile for the bewildered young man.

"Now who under the sun—" pondered the young man, studying her retreating figure.

As for Kay, she had almost reached the Scourge's side before she realized that the young man whom she had welcomed so warmly was an utter stranger. True, he was Fitzzy, and she knew all about him from Claire, but having his picture on your roommate's dresser and hearing about him continually for three years gave scant justification for greeting him with the next thing to a kiss.

"Why are you blushing?" demanded the Scourge.

The new dean was with the Scourge, and Kay looked at her appealingly.

"Miss Fielding needs more color, I think," said the dean graciously. "She spends so much time in the laboratory and the classroom that I fear she doesn't get enough air and exercise."

It turned the Scourge's attention for a moment, and Kay had an instant to reflect, with shame, on the frightful error she had just committed.

"I almost kissed him!" she mused. "I'll have Claire explain that I'm a little ignorant, and haven't read the 'Book of Etiquette.'"

"You're going to prom, of course, Katherine?" asked the Scourge, fixing her fishy gray eyes on the sandy-haired girl before her.

Kay fidgeted. She wished that her four hours' work in the laboratory was all she had to account to the Scourge for. Instead of just that, she had to explain every guest she had, every deviation from her usual coiffure, her taste in clothes, her absence at chapel, and a million other things.

"No, Miss Thomas, I can't," she answered in a low voice.

The Scourge drew back, scandalized. Her huge sleeves bristled, and she placed a skinny brown hand over her tight bosom dramatically.

"Just why, Katherine, may I ask?"

Kay wriggled in her green smock and arranged a falsely ingenuous smile on her face. If she didn't make this effort, she was likely—so Claire had told her—to present a white, terrified face whenever the Scourge addressed her.

"You see I have no evening dress, and you forbade me to borrow," she said.

"Certainly, I forbade you to borrow," boomed the Scourge righteously. "It is an abominable custom, and—"

"Girls will do it," murmured the dean apologetically. "I always did."

The Scourge ignored this.

"And as I told you before, Katherine, I shan't promise to be lenient next time I find you out promenading in borrowed plumes. You see, Miss Greenleaf, the girls of the better families loan their gowns, and then the parents write to us complaining of it. Katherine is inclined to take advantage of her friends of superior social position, and naturally their parents protest. Poor little Miss Paige—the pretty little junior president, you know, daughter of Ex-Governor Paige—has befriended Katherine, and has tried to ignore certain social barriers, and Katherine has, I am afraid, taken advantage of it."

Kay turned an unbecoming shade of henna, as she always did to the Scourge's benign insinuations that the Fielding family was of lower status than most.

"As if," she told herself fiercely, "an inventor father wasn't as good as a Governor father!"

The dean looked apprehensively at Kay.

"I don't think Katherine's morals are affected by her borrowing habits," she smiled.

The Scourge studied Kay for an instant.

"I must say I am disappointed at your lack of class spirit in not supporting these college activities," she said ponderously. "I see no reason why you should not go. Naturally you cannot dress as well as Miss Paige, or Miss Freese, or some of the others with wealthier connections, but no one expects it of you. I insist that you show your loyalty by attending the affair to-night. Since it's a matter of dress, I myself will make you a gift of a dress. You may come with me now. You will excuse us, Miss Greenleaf?"

Kay's heart stopped for a moment. She had a wild desire to rush back to her room and announce that she was going to wear one of the Scourge's "little models."



She walked along to the Faculty House numbly, wondering just which atrocity it would be. She thought of suicide as the only way out. Once the Scourge presented her with the dress, she would have to wear it or be prepared to have her means of support withdrawn. The Scourge would immediately discharge her from the Science Laboratory, and the other berths for self-supporting students were all taken. It would amount to expulsion.

"But, Miss Thomas, you see I've given away my man," gently protested Kay, as they neared what was known as the Execution Chamber—in other words, Miss Thomas's bedroom.

"Nonsense! If you were so foolish, you must go alone, then. I'm sure no one will mind your having no escort."

The Scourge opened the bedroom door. A smell of must and moth balls met the nostrils. Kay stood silently waiting while the Scourge disappeared in her closet and emerged with a green velveteen dress, redolent of moth balls, its plaid silk sleeves billowing from the waist, and its skirt weighty with a thousand ruffles, pleatings, inner linings, and lead pieces.

Kay actually sagged when the Scourge placed it in her arms.

"Thank you, Miss Thomas," she said faintly.

"It's a little old-fashioned," admitted the Scourge generously; "but the color will become you. And as I said to the dean, it's not fitting that self-supporting students should dress as elaborately as the other girls. One likes to feel that the people one helps really need it. I shall be anxious to see you to-night, and to see how the dress looks on you. I had intended giving it to some one. In fact, I had spoken to Bridget about it, but I'm sure she won't mind. Well, good night, Katherine. You'll have to hurry. I see the seniors are dressed already, and the young men have begun to arrive."

"Thank—" gulped Kay again.

"And by the way, Katherine, at the first opportunity I want to speak to you about your plans for the summer. A wealthy friend of the college has offered to let one of the students be her cook this summer, at good wages, and I suggested you, although I didn't know how well you could cook. We'll talk of that another time."

"Thinks I'm in the Bridget class!" sniffed Kay angrily, hurrying back to her

room, fearful lest some one should see her bearing the famous "little model." She was unsuccessful in her attempts to hide it, however. Just as she reached her door, a sophomore squealed out:

"Oh, Kay, are you going to do a stunt in the Scourge's dress?"

Kay nodded briefly and burst into the room. Claire and Tacky were fastening each other up, and Kay had a chance to thrust the dress under her bed before they looked at her.

"Kay, what am I going to do?" wailed Claire. "Fitzzy has suddenly appeared out of the blue. He didn't know it was prom week, but now he wants to go, and he says he wants to take the girl who kissed him at the door. Heaven knows who it was! Kay, was it you?"

"Yes," said Kay, "it was—plainly speaking—me. I recognized his picture, and I welcomed the old friend."

"He seemed to like it," went on Claire. "Anyhow, he insists on coming up to-night, because he never went to a girls' prom, and I promised him you'd go. He won't mind your gym suit, or whatever it is you want to wear."

"I'd thought of wearing one of the Scourge's costumes," said Kay airily. "You might tell him to stick around, and I may drift in later on in the evening."

"Fine!" approved Claire. "Tacky and I have to rush off, because our men are here, and I have to pop into the receiving line. And you'll be there for the toasts, Kay?"

"Y-y-y-es," quavered Kay, who felt an idea about to be born, but was not quite certain what it was.

It was an hour later that the birth actually took place, after an hour of raging at the Scourge's tyranny and the insult of the green dress. There was no getting around the fact that the Scourge had actually meant to be insulting. Kay had worked up a fine red-haired rage over the business, until she was prepared to scratch out the lady's eyes; but a better revenge occurred to her when she idly recalled the words of the sophomore who had seen her with the green dress.

### III

EVERY one was over at Recreation Hall, including even the underclassmen who hung over fire escapes and window sills enviously devouring the rare spectacle of men in bulk.



Kay saw only one freshman—the fat little one who was perpetually being sent home with nervous breakdowns—when she opened her door to look for an assistant in her conspiracy. That one she beckoned commandingly.

"I want you to go over to Faculty Hall and sneak me the Scourge's lemon-colored shoes," she ordered.

Kay had decided to wear the green dress—yes, but she was going to make the Scourge sorry that she did.

While the freshman was rushing over to Faculty Hall, trembling at the honor of being commissioned by an upperclassman—the popular Miss Fielding, of all people—Kay was arranging her hair in the little pointed peak that Miss Thomas affected, and doing her best with the multitude of hooks and eyes on the green dress.

She giggled at her reflection in the mirror, but she was still angry enough to go on with the thing. She thought of Claire's Fitzzy, who would probably be waiting around downstairs for her appearance. She wondered what he would say when he saw what he had to escort.

It was really too bad about him. For three years Kay had taken a sisterly interest in him, and she had always planned that when she actually did meet him he was going to be staggered. That would be, of course, after she was out of college and earning an enormous salary, all of which she would spend on dress and beauty parlors. Her freckles would all be gone, and she would have a brilliant manicure—something which Kay attempted regularly every New Year's Day and then let slide for another year.

Instead of Fitzzy seeing her first in a *svelte* Parisian costume, all beautified and refined, he was going to see her in a ghastly green thing of latter nineteenth century vintage. It was too bad, but Kay reflected that one usually does have to make sacrifices for one's revenge. Fitzzy would have to be forgotten.

After the freshman, giggling nervously, had helped her on with the long, slender, ornate lemon-colored shoes, Kay gave a look of pride at her image in the mirror. She had experimented with Claire's mauve and purple and henna face powders with excellent effect, so that she actually suggested the Scourge's bilious coloring. The little slant she had given to her coiffure gave her the menacing, ridiculously dignified ex-

pression which had helped to get the Scourge her nickname. Kay's own grimy, black-rimmed finger nails made an insulting touch to the picture, which she fully appreciated.

"Oh, Miss Fielding!" gasped the freshman, awestruck at the other's daring. "I do hope you won't get expelled for this!"

Kay, her hand on the knob of the door, paused.

"Deary," she said vulgarly, "it would be worth the price!"

#### IV

HUGH FITZMORSE, serene in the distinction of being the only man present in business clothes, had attached himself, after Claire's early desertion, to a frail, smiling woman whom he understood to be Dean Greenleaf. This association, he was confident, would lend dignity to his soft collar and garnet necktie.

So far as the girls were concerned, Fitzzy would have been welcome in any guise, for he happened to answer the requirements of the year for the ideal man. He had a strong, taut-skinned, brown face, which still retained a few large brown freckles. He had a jolly big mouth with big, gleaming white teeth. He looked, on the whole, as if he canoed, and had beefsteak dinners on the beach, and wore a dirty khaki shirt all summer—which he did.

If he had appeared five years before, he would have been outclassed by the pompadoured, tangoing gentlemen who used to bloom at a *thé dansant* of that period; but fashions in men change. Fitzzy and the jolly ugly men had come into their own.

"Neighbors for years," Claire was confiding to those who expressed their interest in the distinguished-looking young man in "cits" with the dean. "Our families would like—but you know how families are! He's waiting for Kay. If she doesn't come in ten minutes, I'm going to send for her. We are going into the dining room in seven minutes, and she's simply got to be there to propose the healths and—well, you know!"

Claire was a little disturbed by the way her supply of men were behaving. It was all very well inviting them for one's friends, with a slight material reward, but it was generally accepted that the men were, after all, Claire's men, and not to be vamped by the lessees. In spite of this understanding, scarcely was the third dance over when

Tacky, ravishing in pink tulle, disappeared from the ballroom with Bobby Watts, a last year's *fiancé* of Claire's, from Cornell.

Now to the innocent eye of the chaperons, Tacky and Claire had merely gone out for punch; but Claire's watchful eye noted that they cut the next four dances, which could only mean that they were holding hands in the chapel. Furthermore, three other couples of her arrangement had followed the example set by Tacky. Claire was frankly piqued. She was not making gifts of her men, she reflected sourly, but merely loaning them for the evening.

One couple that Claire's escort graft had brought together—Fred Tuller and Martha Gay—had frankly and completely fallen for each other. This was a source of tremendous amusement to the other girls, since Martha, a dowdy, law-abiding little dud, had been crowned Queen of the Crumbs. Claire, with her genius for the appropriate, had obtained for Miss Gay the very worst crumb of her male acquaintance, the equally dowdy and dubby Fred Tuller—on the debating team of his college, too, so Claire had boasted to the eager Martha.

This affair did not trouble Claire, but the one between Tacky and Bobby did, for Bobby was very useful to her occasionally. However, she could only fret inwardly, and meantime keep an anxious blue eye on the door, so that she might seize Kay the instant she entered and sweep her, with Fitzy, into the dining room.

If Kay did not appear, Claire was prepared to cast her roommate out of her life forever, since the one thing in which Claire did not excel, politically, was public speaking. On the few occasions when the junior president had been called upon for formal utterance in the past year, Claire had put herself completely in Kay's hands. She had memorized Kay's speeches, and had had Kay at her side to support her in the frightful ordeal. In spite of Kay, she had sometimes got away with only the first sentence or two, and then had sat down blandly with a charming, apologetic little smile.

To-night there were too many attractive men present for Claire to relish the thought of appearing stupid before them. She would have longed to preside wittily, scattering brilliant epigrams to right and left, and astounding every one with her cleverness; but this was a trick Claire was not to perfect for several years. To-night she needed Kay, and she needed her at once,

for the caterer in charge had just given the announcement for the orchestra to stop and supper to begin.

She hurried up to Dean Greenleaf desperately, her own man tagging after her, depressed with the conviction that women should pay more attention to their escorts and less to their political duties.

"Miss Greenleaf, Kay has not come in yet, and supper simply cannot begin until she gets here," she whispered.

Fitzy, who had not detached himself from the dean for one instant since his arrival, stood politely aloof, as if his close associations with the faculty would not permit him to revive his former familiarity with a mere student.

Dean Greenleaf, demurely Victorian in white georgette, looked anxiously toward the Scourge.

"Oh, dear!" she sighed, troubled at the unpleasant things that lay in store for Katherine Fielding if she dared to defy Miss Ellen Thomas. "I'm afraid Miss Thomas will be very angry. She—she is so much interested in Katherine!"

"Not any more than I am," grimly answered Claire. "She's got to give those toasts, if I have to send Fitzy up to drag her in. I'm not feeling well enough to do that sort of thing myself this evening."

"Glad to be of any service," alertly put in Fitzy.

The dean stole an amused glance at him. She rather suspected him of being in love with pretty Claire Paige, and fancied they had been staging a lovers' quarrel during the evening. She knew that amorous entanglements among the students were to be avoided, but she got so much secret pleasure from watching young love affairs that she tried to persuade herself that she didn't suspect a thing.

"I'm almost tempted to get the Scourge after her," Claire said irritably. "She could do it."

"Supposing we go into the dining room, and, if Katherine does not come in after we are all seated, perhaps I could announce an alteration in the program," suggested the dean kindly, for she understood Claire perfectly.

Claire brightened. She clutched the dean's small, cool hand.

"That's darling of you when I feel so—so faint!"

She turned to her own Brooks Tucker with immense relief, and was able, for the

first time that evening, to look up into his face with the wistful, adoring look which she had always found so effective with California men, Brooks being from Los Angeles.

"Tell me," she said, "about California."

Tacky and Bobby had appeared from nowhere, and followed them into the dining room, Tacky looking coy and smiling at Claire. Fred Tuller and Martha Gay cast grateful looks at Claire as they passed her table. They went on to seat themselves at a table which Claire had specially planned for the dubs, and for the group sneeringly designated by Kay as the Jolly Wholesomes.

The Scourge, by virtue of her years, had to be placed at the head table, and there she sat, casting a blight wherever she glanced, and looking with covert sourness at the dean's place of honor next to the junior president. The dean herself was none too comfortable under the Scourge's eye. Indeed, she never expected to be as long as she stayed at Lacus College. She had never understood the Scourge's importance, yet the students seemed to hold her in far more respect than they accorded to their president, now abroad.

If this was due to affection, the dean saw that she must not antagonize the girls by gently showing the Scourge what was what, and so she had been deferential and obedient; but it had been an unhappy six months for the poor lady, as she puzzled over a mere professor's apparent right to settle the dean's official problems. Miss Greenleaf had privately determined to tender her resignation unless things adjusted themselves more agreeably.

She sat at the table now, smiling at the amusingly dignified young man beside her, while her thoughts revolved in troubled fashion about Kay Fielding and the Scourge. She wished she had known before of Kay's situation. It would have been such a pleasure to outfit her properly, if the thing could have been quietly arranged. Surely the child must suffer from Miss Thomas's obvious tyranny.

The dean bit her lip at her own helplessness in an affair that was plainly in her official province. Fitzzy caught her in a scowl, which she sent over to the Scourge.

## V

So it happened that while Kay fluttered down the staircase, with a fat, tittering freshman staring after her, there were three

people in Recreation Hall praying for her arrival. First there was the dean, who wanted to save her from the Scourge's punishment; then Claire, who wanted to save herself from a humiliating dilemma; and lastly Fitzzy, whose curiosity had been piqued by Claire's tales of Kay's exploits, and who was keen enough to sense drama in the air.

As for Kay, she was resolved to have her revenge or die. Just for a moment, as she looked through the window from outside Recreation Hall, she had a qualm. She could see the Scourge sitting upright, looking about the tables. Kay knew for whom she was looking.

"All right, old girl!" she whispered grimly. "I'm on my way!"

She adjusted her voluminous sleeves, with her eyes fixed a little wistfully on the crowds of girls in their pastel chiffons, the splotches of masculine black among them only accentuating their lacy delicacy. Kay would have liked the dress Fanny Beggs wore, she thought fleetingly, as Fanny, in orchid tulle and sweet peas, passed before the window to her table. She had never had a chance to look pretty—never in her whole life!

There was Lora Duffield, too, looking rather gloomy with the vivacious Town Boy. Lora had confided to Kay, at the last minute, that she had been ordered by the matron to help the negro caterer serve and to send her man into the dining room alone. As a matter of fact, the caterer had been indignant that one of the "misses" had been asked to help him, and had sent her flying back into the ballroom. He had a realization of the proprieties, if the matron hadn't.

But Lora did look pretty in her green taffeta. For an instant Kay sniffed in self-pity, and then rage came over her to think that the Scourge wanted her to wear that ridiculous costume there with all those lovely gowns.

"I may not look pretty," she reflected defiantly, "but I do look funny, and no mistake!"

## VI

THREE hours afterward, juniors in exquisite evening gowns rolled on the floor in Kay's room, hysterically going over her dramatic entrance at the banquet table. Serious-minded members of the faculty giggled in the faculty drawing-room, next



day, discussing Kay's astounding impersonation. In the dean's dainty boudoir, that very night, a fragile little brown-haired lady in the early forties sat at a black walnut escritoire, smiling over a letter that she was writing to a jolly-eyed, gray-haired gentleman in charge of a special phase of Yale undergraduate thought.

Kay, after her first overwhelming realization of what she was doing, flung back her head in the Scourge's best manner, and bristled up to the head table, while a stunned silence fell over the hall. Then a titter began, followed by a swelling roar of laughter.

Before sitting down, Kay stopped short, drew herself up to her full height, turned around, and glared ominously at the assembly. She bowed frostily to Claire, nodded patronizingly to the dean, and took in Fitzzy and his tweed with freezing scorn.

Chairs were drawn back at all the tables, and excited girls whispered of Kay's reputed waggishness to amused escorts. Faculty guests endeavored to appear disapproving, and succeeded in looking interested and human. Waiters hurried up to the caterer, demanding to know if there was to be a cabaret or entertainment before the dinner. As for Dean Greenleaf, she sat demurely silent, though within her was a triumphant joy in the courage that dared defy Miss Thomas.

Kay began to speak, proposed her toasts, and glared down the gigglers, so perfectly in the manner of the Scourge that a few were actually intimidated by her "squelches"—a word which the Scourge had inspired some time before. She made deprecatory allusions to dancing and merrymaking, as the Scourge always did on festive occasions, and sat down after a brief and unflattering comparison of the young folks of to-day and the young folks of thirty years ago.

The dining room was in an uproar as soon as she had sat down, and Kay, after an exchange of glances with a choking Claire, decided that the better part of valor was discretion. She kissed her hand impudently to the dining room and fled to the nearest exit, her green draperies flung irreverently over her arm.

Once outside the hall, she scrambled across the college toward the dormitory as fast as she could go. She didn't care what they did with her now. She felt only a fierce elation in her triumph.

The girls and the men were shrieking over the impersonation, stopping short every time they met the Scourge's furious eye. Kay's own chums were certain that it would mean expulsion, and exchanged frantic comments from table to table. They were already on the point of getting up a petition to save her from her certain doom.

The Scourge, purple with indignation, leaned toward the dean.

"I think, Miss Greenleaf, that this is a matter which cannot wait until morning," she said in a low voice. "I recommend that you call a faculty meeting at once in the Tennis Club room, to have that girl instantly expelled. She ought not to be allowed on the grounds overnight!"

The dean lifted her eyebrows. At last the time had come to show this tyrant that she, and not Ellen Thomas, was dean. Kay's defiance had given her the courage to fight for her own prestige, and for the first time she saw that the girls' apparent allegiance to the Scourge was not inspired by affection, but by terror. It was not she, Alicia Greenleaf, but Ellen Thomas, who was the interloper in the college.

"I think, Miss Thomas," said the dean clearly, "that I am the best judge as to occasions for faculty conferences. Certainly Miss Fielding will remain in the college. As representative of President Crawford I will say that much. Her impersonation was a spontaneous bit of fun that I feel ought to be encouraged among young people."

"It was an insult—an insult to me!"

The Scourge's voice trembled with rage.

"I think you misunderstood," said the dean quietly. "Any seasoned teacher is accustomed to student cartoons and burlesques, and takes them for what they are—merely good-natured raillery. It is absurd to assume that I shall punish any one for it. I value spontaneity among my girls too highly."

It was, Claire said afterward, as fine a bit of "squelching" as had ever been exhibited at Lacus College. The Scourge simply collapsed in amazement, while the dean, smiling brightly, continued her conversation with the senior president and her escort.

In the dean's mind ideas were flowering as to what she would do with the power she had hitherto been afraid to use. There were a number of things she wanted to ar-



range for the working students—things of which she knew the Scourge would disapprove. Now, at last, she felt free to do as she thought best for the girls; and the first thing to be done was to find an agreeable berth for Kay Fielding.

"I need a secretary," mused the dean. "Perhaps she would let me provide her wardrobe, too, if I made it on a five-year loan basis. Poor child, she looked so gallant coming here in that atrocity among all the pretty dresses! I will send for her the first thing to-morrow, before the luncheon party."

Claire, reading the signs correctly, gave the signal to Tacky that Kay was in safe hands, and Tacky proceeded to tell Bobby of the daring episodes that had marked Kay Fielding's career at Lacus. Claire leaned gently and winsomely toward Brooks for her customary between-soup-and-fish repartee.

"You know, Brooks," she sighed, "women don't like me."

Oddly enough, her impudent little roommate was at that moment speculating as to whether Claire had got to that particular line. She knew Claire so well that she could have told the exact course of her conversation with a young man in a given number of hours. Indeed, she had often threatened to steal her stuff.

Kay had gone from the dining room to the dormitory; but the place was so deserted that she paused on the dark veranda, and decided to sit in the canvas swing for a while, until she could manage to get her thoughts together.

Somehow she could not realize that she had actually done that frightfully audacious thing over there in the dining room. Surely it was a dream! Kay felt the knob on the top of her head, and slowly took out the hairpins. Well, she was done for now! To-morrow the dean would send for her, and she would be expelled.

She didn't know where she would go. The family would not understand at all. They never did. She'd have to go to Chicago, or New York, or some place, and get a job. But then she didn't have the money.

"Still," and Kay sighed reminiscently, "it was worth it!"

She saw a dark figure coming swiftly up the path, and she sat very still. One of the men had been sent over for a scarf or wrap, probably. If she sat very still, he would not see her in the dark.

Then she heard her name in a stage whisper. It was Fitzy.

"Where are you?"

He stumbled across the wicker chairs in the darkness toward her.

"Did Claire Paige send you?" asked Kay, bewildered.

"She didn't have to," cheerfully answered Fitzy, settling himself calmly beside her. "After that nice warm welcome to-day—"

"No fair!" warned Kay, slightly uncomfortable. "You see, I—I—"

"Never mind!" Fitzy assured her magnificently. "Girls always act that way about me. I only wanted to apologize for seeming a little bit cold and—er—restrained at first. It's not my nature at all. As a rule I—"

"I don't doubt it," cut in Kay, furiously red, and conscious that her hair was decidedly informal in arrangement. "But please tell me why you followed me to-night. Do they want me to leave?"

"It was suggested by that old terror in purple," admitted Fitzy; "but my friend the dean came to the rescue, and everything is all right now. The dean is strong for you, and ready to present a diadem."

"I am—oh, I am glad!"

Kay breathed freely once again.

Fitzy bent over toward her, and studied her face curiously in the light of a stray moonbeam.

"Claire's been telling me about you for years, but do you know she never said a word about this gorgeous red hair—"

Kay swiftly jabbed in a couple of hairpins. He was trying to tease her! Certainly she must look frightful; and how horrid it was to look comic to the person you wanted to consider you fascinating! From now on, Kay vowed mentally, she was going to study Claire's technic.

"Don't put it up," begged Fitzy, and his voice had a warm tone that made Kay know he was not teasing her, after all. "I was just telling the dean that it takes a truly attractive girl to dare to appear funny when men are around. I'll bet you don't take a lip stick and mascara on a camping trip, do you?"

"I'm lucky if I take a comb," rippled Kay.

"I knew we were affinities!" He nodded triumphantly, and leaned back in the swing. "Just the kind of girl I've been hunting. Attractive—"

"But I'm not attractive," confessed Kay woefully. "I didn't want you ever to see me until I was rich and tall and *svelte* and beautiful—"

Fitzzy threw back his head and laughed merrily.

"We'll take care of that," he assured her. Kay felt suddenly snug and protected, as if she no longer needed to fight her own battles. "You know, Kay, I think

we need to see a lot of each other. I want to know all about you, and all that sort of thing."

Kay murmured a faint response. She was happy. It could not be true that she was sitting here with Fitzzy, and that Fitzzy liked her. He slipped his hand over hers, and Kay did not take hers away.

"You know," she sighed wistfully, after a moment, "women don't like me."

## Nickie and Pem

THE STORY OF A YOUNG WOMAN WHO DID NOT WANT TO  
WASTE HER LIFE

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

"PEM, you're too darned good!" said Nickie.

"I don't call it being good," replied Miss Pembroke. "I call it simply being self-respecting."

This was the sort of thing her friends found objectionable, and Nickie began to object now.

"Lord!" said she. "Don't we work hard enough to deserve a little fun now and then? It won't hurt your precious self-respect to speak to a man now and then, will it? I can't—"

"Oh, that's all nonsense!" interrupted Miss Pembroke. "I see enough of men, and I put up with enough from them. When I'm off duty, I don't have to put up with anything, and I *won't*!"

"Nobody wants you. The boys who are coming this evening are awfully nice boys. If you'd just come in and speak to them—"

Miss Pembroke closed her book sharply.

"Nickie," she said, "I'm very fond of you; but I don't like your friends—not any of them—and I wish you'd let me alone."

"Certainly," replied Nickie, in a haughty and offended tone.

She turned all her attention upon the process of manicuring, but neither the haughtiness nor the silence reassured Miss

Pembroke, who knew that they wouldn't last. It was hardly worth while to open her book again, for Nickie would be sure to interrupt.

"It's getting to be too much of a good thing," she reflected. "I needed a good rest after that last case, but I'll never get it while Nickie's here. This whole thing was a mistake. I ought to have taken a room somewhere by myself, where I couldn't be bothered."

This was by no means the first time she had regretted her present domestic arrangements. It was all Nickie's fault, of course. Nickie had told her what a fine thing it would be to join with three other graduate nurses in taking a flat.

"A nice little home of our own," Nickie had said, "where we can rest when we want to, and entertain our friends, and keep all our things. The other girls are simply great. You'll like them."

Miss Pembroke had said that five girls were too many.

"But we'll never all be home at the same time," Nickie had assured her. "Lots of times you and I will have the place to ourselves."

In the course of a year this had happened only once. When Nickie was at home, Pem was off on a case. When Pem came home, instead of finding her faithful

Nickie, one of the other girls would be there, or sometimes two of them; and Pem didn't like them. She didn't like their "parties," or their conversation, or their cheerful, careless style of housekeeping.

She herself was never careless, and, though she was even-tempered and polite, she wasn't often cheerful. As a nurse, she was matchless. Doctors wanted to send her to their most troublesome and exacting patients, because not only was she quick, capable, and intelligent, but she could hold her tongue and keep her temper, and she had a cool, quiet way with her that kept her patients in good order.

But this cool, quiet way of which doctors so highly approved was not at all pleasing to her housemates. Even Nickie thought it deplorable.

"Pem," she had said to her once, "you could be young and beautiful, if you'd only learn how!"

There was truth in that observation. Miss Pembroke had both youth and beauty, and somehow managed to disguise them, so that they often went unnoticed. People would say that she was "impressive," or "dignified," or something of that sort, because they never saw her off guard, as Nickie saw her now. She was a tall, slender, dark-haired girl, with an austere, fine-bred face—not the sort of face one would turn to look after in the street, but a face which patients—above all, male patients—found very, very hard to forget. Her slender hands were clasped about one knee, and her clear amber eyes were staring thoughtfully before her. She was, thought Nickie, engaged in daydreams of some mysterious and enchanting kind unknown to more ordinary girls. But in reality—

"Nickie's getting coarse," Miss Pembroke was reflecting.

There was no coarseness to be seen in Miss Nicholson's rosy, jolly face, nor to be observed in her manners and conversation. Indeed, no one but Miss Pembroke had yet seen any trace of it; but Pem was by nature critical, and just at this moment she was jaded and dispirited after six weeks of a ferocious typhoid patient, who had fallen in love with her in a very trying and ill-tempered way. Moreover, she was mortally weary of Nickie's persistence.

"I'm sick and tired of men," she thought. "All Nickie ever thinks of is men, and going to parties, and having what she calls a good time."

Now this was not quite doing justice to Nickie. When she was not working, she was undeniably very fond of playing; but when you consider how very short and infrequent were her play times, and how very hard and exhausting was her work; when you consider that this lively, warm-hearted young creature had to witness every sort of human agony and wretchedness; when you bear in mind the tremendous responsibilities she so faithfully accepted; her generous readiness to do more than she needed to do, her charity, her sympathy, her sturdy courage—when you think of all this, it is not difficult to forgive her for being somewhat frivolous during her little hours of freedom.

There were weeks at a time when men, parties, and having a good time gave her mighty little concern. Just now, however, her mind was entirely given to such matters; and, as Pem expected, she couldn't help trying again to persuade her friend.

"Oh, Pem!" she said coaxingly. "Just this once! Come in and speak to the boys, and if you don't like them—"

"No!" said Pem.

But she did, and, by doing so, she changed the course of three lives.

She had no intention of seeing Nickie's friends. In fact, she came nearer to quarreling with Nickie than she had ever yet come, and she retired to her own room with flushed cheeks and a frown on her calm brow. She was not in the habit of losing her temper, and this unusual annoyance disturbed her. She was restless, and couldn't settle down to read or sew.

Her neat little room seemed all at once too neat and too little, and she wanted to get out of it. It was a clear, fine night. A walk, even a solitary and aimless one, wouldn't be bad. She had put on her hat and coat, and was just about to open her door, when—when Nickie's party arrived.

Impossible to go out now! In order to reach the front door, she would have to pass by the sitting room, and Nickie would see her and stop her.

"Nickie has absolutely no pride!" she thought, angrier than ever. "Even after what I said to her, she'd try to drag me in there!"

She took off her hat and flung it on the bed.

"I'll read," she decided.

She couldn't read. The party disturbed her too much. They were laughing and

talking, and presently some one began to play the piano and sing. It was an idiotic song, but it was delivered in a hearty, boyish voice that was somehow very touching.

There was violent applause when the singer finished, and after a few minutes he began again.

Pem came nearer to the door, her face grown very pale. "Keep the Home Fires Burning!" Some one else sang that—one night in Montreal—the night before the troop ship went out—a boy in a lieutenant's uniform. Pem snapped the light and stood listening in the dark, her hands clenched, her eyes closed.

"So turn the dark clouds inside out,  
Till the boys come home."

"Oh, God!" whispered Pem; for that boy would never come home, and the Pem who had listened to his gallant young voice was gone, too.

The singing stopped, only not for Pem. It went on sounding in her ears. The voice that she would never hear again and the living voice mingled together until she could bear it no longer. She must go in and see this other one—see with her own eyes that he was a stranger, in no way like—any one else.

## II

NICKIE welcomed her with a cry of joy.

"Here's my pal!" she said, triumphant. "Now you'll all have to be good little boys. Pem, here's Mr. Brown and Mr. Caswell and Mr. Hadley. Look 'em over!"

But the only one Pem wanted to see was Caswell—the boy who had been singing, the boy who must not look like some one else. Well, he didn't. That one had been fair and this one was dark. There was no resemblance in a single feature; and yet the spell was not broken.

There was some quality in this man that stirred intolerable memories to life in Pem—something in his voice, in his smile, in the hearty grip of his hand. She looked and looked at him, trying in vain to catch that fugitive likeness.

She had never been so lovely, or so utterly careless of her own beauty. Her eyes were wonderfully luminous and soft in her pale face. Her hair, a little disordered by the hat she had pulled off, floated about her forehead in tiny, misty threads. She hadn't a trace of that cool, quiet manner now.

Under that look of hers young Caswell grew suddenly ardent.

"I say!" he began. "You know—you're simply—simply marvelous!"

"Didn't I tell you so?" said Nickie, delighted. "Now sing some more, Cas. That's what brought her to."

"No," said Pem. "Please don't."

The spell was slowly dissolving. She could see Caswell without illusions now—an ordinary nice-looking young fellow, unfortunately a little the worse for drink just now, like the others.

She had come in without any idea of staying, but for Nickie's sake she resigned herself to a wearisome half hour. This was Nickie's idea of a good time, and these were Nickie's "awfully nice boys"! One of them offered Pem his pocket flask, but she declined, civilly enough, and sat down on the piano stool, so that Caswell couldn't sing again.

She was quite aware that he was looking at her all the time. Very well, let him look! She felt a thousand miles away from him and the others, and somehow very lonely.

This sudden change disturbed Nickie. Now that she had got Pem here at last, it would never do to let the party prove a fizzle. She whispered to one of the men, and then called out:

"Pem, get your hat on! We're all going up to the Devon to dance!"

"No, thanks," said Pem firmly.

There was a chorus of protests.

"Oh, come on, Pem!" Nickie entreated. "I don't want to go alone with three fellows, and I'm dying for a dance. Please, Pem, just for an hour!"

"No, thanks," said Pem again. "I'm sorry, but I don't feel up to it. I'm tired."

And then, beside her, she heard a voice which, in spite of herself, she could not hear unmoved.

"I say, Miss Pembroke! Please!"

She shook her head, but she smiled, for once more she caught a glimpse of that curious likeness, and it made her gentle toward him. What was it? What could she see in this flushed, unsteady boy to put her in mind of that other, fine and stern, a young knight?

"Look here!" said Caswell, bending lower, so that only she could hear. "Please don't—don't judge me by this. I—I'm—I can't tell you how sorry I am for you to see me—like this. I—I don't do it, you know, I give you my word. You see, I've



just come back from Melbourne, and this was my first night on shore, and—if you'd just give me another chance!"

"All right, I will," said Pem suddenly. "I'll see you again. I'll be glad to."

And she meant it. She no longer wanted to deny the unreasonable, half scornful liking she felt for this man. She did like him, and that was enough.

"Oh, but, look here!" he cried. "We're sailing to-morrow for Halifax. I've only got this one night!"

"But you'll come back to New York, won't you?"

"Oh, some day!" he answered bitterly. "God knows when—I don't. We're running all over after cargoes. We may come back here from Halifax, and we may go anywhere. It may be months before I see you again."

"Would that be so awful?" asked Pem, with a smile.

But he didn't smile.

"Yes," he said. "It would—for me!"

Pem was annoyed at her own response to his emotion. She wanted to laugh at him, and she could not. This was the worst sort of nonsense—the sort of thing Nickie was always telling her about. Nickie would call this "thrilling." Well, Pem didn't.

"I'm sorry for you," she said ironically; but, as if there were magic in his eyes, the words turned to truth when she looked at him. "Please don't be silly!" she added, in a quite different voice—gentle, almost appealing.

"The only silly thing would be to pretend it wasn't like this," said he. "I didn't want it to be this way, but—it just happened. As soon as I saw you—"

Pem jumped up.

"All right, Nickie!" she called out. "I'll go with you!"

### III

CASWELL got into the taxi after her and slammed the door.

"Oh, Pem!" he said. "Pem, you wonderful girl!"

"You know you really are silly!" she protested.

"Then I hope to Heaven I'll never be anything else! I'd give all the common sense and prudence and so on in the world for one night like this. Hang being sensible, anyhow! Let's be silly, Pem!"

"I am—I have been—sillier than I ever was before in my life. Don't, Arthur!"

She felt obliged to object to his putting his arm about her shoulders and kissing her—a very unconvincing little objection, however, to which he paid no attention.

"You do love me, don't you, Pem?" he asked, and waited a long time. "Pem! I say, Pem! You do love me, don't you?"

"Oh, I really don't know!" she cried impatiently.

Was it love, she thought? It was not in any way the love she had felt before—not that strange and terrible thing, half pride, half humility, half anguish and half ecstasy.

"That couldn't ever come again," she thought.

It had been her consolation for so long, that never again would that intolerable emotion stir her heart. After she had lost that one man, there wasn't another walking the earth who could capture her interest—until this evening.

She couldn't understand the glamour that enveloped young Caswell, the inexplicable charm of him. He was neither very handsome nor very clever—just an ordinary nice-looking boy; and yet, when he said that he would give all the common sense and prudence and so on in the world for one night like this, she agreed with him in her heart.

They had gone to a restaurant and danced, they had taken a taxicab to another restaurant and danced again, they had had supper—that was all there was to it. It was simply one of those brainless "parties" so dear to Nickie—with too much drinking on the part of the men, too much smoking, the stupidest sort of talk and laughter. Then why had it been so beautiful? Because of that boy's glance which always followed her, that look on his face, his fervent, halting love-making?

Suddenly she stopped trying to reason about it. It *was* beautiful. She had been utterly happy again; she was happy now.

"Pem!" he said. "Oh, Pem! Can't you tell me? I'm going away, you know."

His voice broke, she felt the arm about her shoulders tremble a little, and her eyes filled with tears.

"I'm afraid I do love you," she said.

She gave him one kiss, and then, with a little laugh, pushed him away.

"Don't talk any more about it—not now," she said. "Look! The sky's getting light. It's morning."

"And I'm due on board at ten o'clock," he said. "I'll come back to you, Pem."

Pem, you won't forget me? You won't—you couldn't, could you, Pem?"

"I don't think so," she answered.

The taxi had stopped before the apartment house, where Nickie and the two other boys, just arrived, were waiting for them in the street. A pallid light was spreading in the sky, and a strange quiet lay over the city. Trucks rumbled far away, but there wasn't a voice or a footstep. The street lamps still burned wanly.

"It's time for breakfast," suggested one of the boys. "Let's go to a beanery and have something to eat."

"No!" said Pem sharply. "We've had enough. Good-by! Come on, Nickie!"

For she had seen on Nickie's face something that hurt her—something that she had often seen in the mirror, reflected in her own eyes.

#### IV

NICKIE was lying on the bed, flat on her back, without a pillow, her eyes resolutely closed, in a stern effort to rest. That morning, just as she was saying good-by—very willingly—to the cantankerous old lady with a broken arm whom she had been attending for three weeks, Dr. Lucas had telephoned and told her that he wanted her for night duty on a pneumonia case. It was a bad case, and she had a bad night ahead of her. She must rest now; but she couldn't. This wasn't rest.

She heard the key turned in the latch, and the front door opened quietly.

"Hello, Mac!" she called.

But it was not Miss McCarty who answered. It was Pem.

"You home, Nickie?" she said. "That's nice."

She came into the bedroom. Nickie sat up and stared at her with wide eyes.

"For Pete's sake!" she exclaimed. "What's the meaning of all this, Pem?"

"I don't know," replied Pem slowly. She had taken off her hat and coat, and was looking at herself in the glass—at her carefully dressed hair, the artful touch of color in her cheeks, the new frock of navy twill with red leather buttons. "I look rather nice, don't I, Nickie?"

"Yes," said Nickie, "stunning; but—well, I suppose I'm not used to it. But what's the reason, Pem?"

Pem's explanation did not satisfy her. Pem said that her patient was a wealthy young woman suffering from a mild form

of melancholia. She had to be diverted, and—

"I had to look halfway decent, going about with her," said Pem. "She wanted me to."

"Finished now?" Nickie asked.

"No—it may last for months; but I often get an afternoon off when her sister comes to stay with her. She likes me to clear out sometimes, so that she can tell her sister how awful I am."

"Doesn't she like you, Pem?"

"Oh, pretty well; but she doesn't really like anybody but herself. That's what's the matter with her. She's got everything on earth—money, and friends, and a wonderful husband. Lend me some of your powder, Nickie?"

"Powder? Going out again now, Pem?"

Pem nodded.

"Who with?"

"With a man," said Pem, laughing.

"Don't faint!"

"Of course it's not my business," observed Nickie, "but it—it isn't the husband, is it?"

She waited a long time for an answer.

"I wish you'd tell me, Pem. I always tell you things."

Pem turned and looked at her steadily.

"No, you don't, Nickie," she said; "not always."

Nickie looked back at her friend quite as steadily.

"I do," she said. "I tell you anything that really matters. You see, Pem, the reason I am asking this is because I thought you were rather gone on Arthur Caswell. You see, I've known him for a long while, so I—"

Pem turned to open the bureau drawer, and to take out a pair of white gloves and a handkerchief.

"I'll tell you something, Nickie," she said in a curt, cool voice. "He would never have looked at me that night if I had been my real self. I acted like a fool, and that's what he liked. That's what every one likes. After he'd gone, everything seemed tame and flat, and I felt so lonely that I couldn't stand it. I'm going to keep on being a fool, Nickie. I'm going to make people like me. I'm going to live, and enjoy myself!"

"All right," said Nickie; "but what about Arthur Caswell?"

"He'll never come back."

"Yes, he will."

"If he does, then—but he won't. I'm not going to waste my life—or what's left of it."

"If I was going to waste any lives," said Nickie, "I'd rather waste my own than any one else's."

Pem was astounded.

"What's the matter with you?" she demanded. "Are you trying to preach to me, Nickie? It was you who started the whole thing—always pestering me to go to parties."

"I never went out with a married man in my life," said Nickie; "and I never would, either."

"That's a little too much, after that last party!" returned Pem scornfully. "You wouldn't go out with a married man, but you don't mind three fellows who've been drinking!"

"How do you know I didn't mind?" cried Nickie, jumping up. "Just let me tell you, Pem—I knew Arthur Caswell's people in Halifax. His father's a strict Presbyterian. I know what he'd think about that, and I'd have stopped Arthur, too, if—"

Pem was about to make a sharp retort, but she changed her mind in time. Going over to Nickie, she put her arms about her friend.

"I'm sorry, little pal," she said gently. "I didn't mean to."

Nickie gave her a rough little hug.

"All right, Pem," she said. "I know! But, Pem, for my sake, please don't go out with this man. You'll be sorry for it—awfully sorry. It's not like you. Don't do it, Pem!"

"You don't understand, Nickie. He's a wonderful man, so honorable—"

"He's not honorable if he goes out with you behind his wife's back."

"How can he help it, when she's turned her back on him for good? She's horrible to him. Nobody else would have put up with her as he has. He is honorable, Nickie; he's a gentleman through and through. He's so lonely—you don't know what that is, but I do. He's longing and longing for women to be nice and friendly to him. If his wife was ever halfway decent to him—"

She stopped short, because the doorbell had rung.

"There he is," she said. "Nickie, it's nothing to be ashamed of. I wish you'd see him and talk to him. Then you'd un-

derstand. Open the door and talk to him while I'm getting ready."

Nickie hesitated for a moment.

"All right!" she said, then. "I'll talk to him!"

Without even troubling to smooth her unruly hair, off she went, down the passage. In a moment she was back.

"Pem," she cried, "Arthur Caswell is here!"

They stared at each other in a sort of dismay, both speechless for a time.

"I'll take him out, quick," said Pem. "When Mr. Blanchard comes, tell him something—anything. I'll see you later, Nickie. I'll stop here before I go back to Mr. Blanchard's."

"All right," Nickie said again.

When Pem had gone, she closed the bedroom door after her; but she didn't even try to rest now.

## V

PEM went down the passage with a lagging step and a heart strangely troubled and doubting.

"No," she said to herself. "Of course it can't be like that. I just imagined it. I've thought about it so much that—no, it couldn't really have been so wonderful. He couldn't have been so dear. When I see him again I shall get over being so silly."

But that silliness was the best thing in her life. For weeks the glamour of that enchanted evening had colored all her days. The music they had danced to still sounded in her ears, faint and stirring. When she closed her eyes, she could see again the sparkle and glitter of that tinsel fairyland of Broadway, made true and fine by the boy's love.

"I won't be an idiot!" she told herself. "When I see him again, I'll find that he's—not really like that!"

So, with what fortitude she had, she entered the little sitting room. He didn't hear her. He was standing at the window, with his back toward the room, his hands in his pockets—such a straight, stalwart figure!

"Hello!" said Pem. "It's a surprise to see you here again!"

Then he turned, and it was true, all of it—that look she had remembered, that glamour, that enchantment.

"Oh, Pem!" he said. "Didn't you know I'd come?"

For a minute she was utterly content in his arms, as if her restless and disconsolate spirit had at last found peace; but not for long. She moved away, still holding his hand, and looking at him with a misty smile.

"You're so beautiful!" he said. "Sometimes I thought you couldn't be as lovely as I remembered, but you're a hundred times—"

The clock on the mantelpiece struck three.

"Let's go out!" she said hastily.

He was a little taken aback.

"Can't we stay here, Pem? I want a chance to talk to you."

"Not here. We can talk somewhere else. I know a nice little tea room where we can dance."

"I don't want to dance," said he; "and—look here, Pem! I'm a bit hard up, this trip."

She couldn't help kissing him for that.

"As if I cared! We'll take a bus ride, then."

"No, we won't do that, either," said he, half laughing. "We'll stay where we are. I want to talk to you. I—does this suit you, Pem?"

From his pocket he pulled out a ring, carried loose in there, without a box, without even a bit of paper, and laid it in her hand. There it was, honest and unashamed, like himself—the tiniest little diamond. She stared down at it through a veil of tears.

"Best I could do," he said a little forlornly. "You see, I never tried to save my pay, and it's darned small, Pem, old girl. I'm only third mate. I dare say I don't make as much as you do."

"Never mind! That doesn't matter," she answered, so low that he could scarcely hear.

It seemed to her the most touching and beautiful thing that had ever happened, that he should come to her with his poor little ring, so simply and loyally offering her all he had.

"But we can manage," he went on more cheerfully. "I've figured it out. We can take a little flat, you know, and if we're careful, we can get on. You won't mind a pretty quiet life, will you, Pem? Nickie told me you weren't keen on going out and all that. I'm not, either—at least, not now. I was, you know, but not now. We'll settle down—"

He stopped short, looking at her with a faint frown, but she did not meet his eyes. She was shocked, appalled, at her own traitorous thoughts. She glanced again at the ring, and tried in vain to recapture the tenderness and pity she had felt.

To settle down and marry this boy—not to dance with him, not to listen to his love-making to the accompaniment of music, in a bright dazzle of light, but to marry him and settle down to a deadly quiet life—she knew very well what that meant. She had often enough been in the sort of little flat they would have to live in. She went into such places when sickness was already there. She had seen all the makeshifts, all the sordid and pitiful anxieties of such existences—people who hadn't enough towels and sheets, who couldn't afford hot water bottles, who couldn't afford even the necessary sunlight.

The quiet life! What had he to do with a quiet life? He had come suddenly into her own chill, somber existence, startling her into youth and gayety—that was why she loved him. A dear, honest, silly boy, to dance with, to be happy with for an evening, but—

"Pem!" he said abruptly. "What's the matter?"

At his peremptory tone, she found it less difficult to speak. She put her hand on his shoulder and spoke as kindly as she could.

"I'm afraid you're going ahead a little too fast," she said. "After all, we've only seen each other once before, you know. Doesn't it seem—"

"Do you mean that you don't care for me?" he interrupted.

His bluntness disconcerted her.

"No," she said, with a trace of impatience; "but we don't really know each other. I think we ought to wait—until we're sure."

He was silent for a long time, searching her downcast face.

"You're sure now, aren't you?" he asked at last. "All right, Pem! All my fault! I might have known—"

And in the face of his sincerity, his honest and unresentful pain, she could give him no false hope, no false consolation, nothing but the truth revealed to him by her silence.

He took the ring from her hand and looked at it with a shadowy smile. Then, before she knew what he was about, he



threw it out of the open window into the street.

She came to the window and looked down, but she couldn't see it in the street far below.

"Oh, why did you do that?" she cried. "Why, didn't—"

A sob rose in her throat. She turned away her head, so that he should not see her tears.

"Don't cry!" he said. "It's all my fault. I should have known better, of course. I say, Pem! Please don't cry! The whole thing isn't worth it. Just—let's say good-by, Pem!"

She held out both her hands. After a brief hesitation, he took them in his.

"I'll never forgive myself!" she said unsteadily. "Never!"

"Nothing to forgive," he assured her, with a gallant attempt at a smile. "I—anyhow, I'm glad I ever saw you. Good-by, Pem!"

If it could only have ended then! If he could have gone then, with that moment for them to remember! But it was their great misfortune that no such memory should be left to them.

The doorbell rang, and Nickie came out of her room.

"Shall I go, Pem?" she asked. "Or—"

Pem looked at her helplessly. As the flat was arranged, the front door could not be opened without affording a plain view of the sitting room.

"I'll let it ring," said Nickie, with a fine effect of carelessness. "No one we want to see."

But that was not Pem's way. She came of an austere and stiff-necked family, living secluded on an exhausted little Vermont farm. They had nothing much but pride to keep them warm in winter, to feed and clothe them. Pride was the only heritage that came down to Pem, and pride would not allow her to refuse admission to Mr. Blanchard, no matter what it cost her. As for the possible cost to Arthur Caswell and to Nickie, that didn't occur to her just then.

She opened the door herself.

"I'm afraid I'm a little late," said a courteous, apologetic voice. "Please—"

Then, as he followed Pem inside, he caught sight of the others, and made a general bow.

"This is Mr. Blanchard, Nickie," said Pem.

He looked altogether what Pem had called him—a gentleman through and through. He was a rather slight man in the middle forties, with a sensitive, harassed face, hair a little gray on the temples, and fine, dark eyes. He hadn't in the least a furtive or shamefaced air. Indeed, there was a quiet sort of straightforwardness about him that favorably impressed Nickie, in spite of her prejudice against the man.

"I've heard a great deal about you from Miss Pembroke," he said.

Nickie liked his smile, his voice, his well bred ease. She liked all this, and yet, when Pem presented Caswell to him, her liking was a pain. Arthur seemed so young, so awkward, such an immature and unimpressive creature, in contrast to his senior. She wanted to defend him against comparison. She wanted to force Pem to see, and Mr. Blanchard to see, the splendid qualities in the young sailor.

But she had no chance. Before she could interfere, Blanchard had mentioned that it was growing late. Pem had answered that she was ready, and off they went.

## VI

"I WOULD never have told you," said Blanchard. "I would have gone on the best way I could, without you; but now—"

Pem looked at him across the table. By the light of the gold-shaded electric candle his thin face was almost incredibly fine. He looked, she thought, a little inhuman, with his delicate features, his dark, glowing eyes, and the silvery gleam of white on his temples. His tremendous consideration for her, his squeamishness, had made his story such a long one!

After all, she wasn't a girl just out of school.

"I've seen more of life than he has," she reflected; "and yet it has taken him two hours to tell me that his wife is going to divorce him. I suppose it'll take another hour before he can tell me that he hopes I can marry him when he's free. I suppose it ought to take me a week to answer him!"

She stifled a sigh. It was nonsense for him to try to shield his wife from Pem, who had two months in which to observe her savage egotism. Such a dilemma for his chivalrous soul—to make it clear to Pem that his wife had no just cause for divorc-

ing him, and yet to protect the woman against the implication of cruel unreasonableness. All things considered, he had done very well.

"A—a mutual agreement," he had called it. "I think you'd better not go back," he went on gently. "She's very much upset. Her sister and her mother are with her."

Silence fell between them. The orchestra was playing in a gallery behind them—a gay and delicate air. The rooms were filled with the sort of people Pem liked about her, with light, laughing voices, faint perfumes, and the smoke of cigarettes.

One of Blanchard's hands was extended on the table—a slender hand, beautifully tended. He was so fastidious in everything, so kind, so honorable, so appealing in his masculine assumption of her ignorance and helplessness. He wanted to take care of her and shelter her. He would have been horrified at the thought of her living in a little flat on a third mate's pay. He would have turned pale at the sight of that poor, poor little ring.

"You're very quiet," he said, a little anxiously. "I hope I haven't—"

Pem looked up with a smile.

"No!" she thought, as if defying a voice that had not spoken. "It's no use! I'm not like that. I couldn't stand it. I shall be happy with Everett. It's his kind of

life that I want." Aloud she said, in the ladylike, noncommittal tone he expected of her: "I'd better be going back to Nickie now."

Blanchard took her back in a taxi, and all the way he talked of impersonal matters—not a word of love. She knew he wouldn't mention that until he was free to do so honorably.

He left her at the door. She turned as she entered, and saw him standing bare-headed in the street—a handsome and distinguished man, yet somehow pitiful to her, with that touch of white at the temples.

The flat was empty when she got in. Nickie, of course, had gone to her case. Arthur Caswell—she couldn't imagine his destination.

On the kitchen table were the disorderly remains of a tea for two. The sitting room, too, was very untidy, as Nickie always left it. Pem turned on the electric light and began to set it in order. She emptied the ash tray, full of the stubs of those horrible cheap cigarettes she had seen Caswell smoking. She picked up the magazines that lay on the floor, and straightened the chairs.

The piano was open, with music on the rack. She went to close it. The lid slipped from her hand, and, falling, jarred the strings with a queer, trembling discord. She could have imagined it the faint, distant echo of a voice—a young voice.

### THE SORROW OF LOVE

ONCE more the old sorrow is upon me—  
The sorrow of love. The old friendly years  
Cannot save me, their counsel I do not heed;  
My eyes are eyes only for one face,  
My heart beats only for her footsteps—  
On the stairs, oh, beloved—on the stairs!

Once more I shall ascend into heaven,  
Once more I shall pace the floors of hell.  
There is no help, for so was I born.  
Wise in many things—  
Wise with the wisdom of many serpents—  
In this I shall never be wise!  
Fool of fair faces, till my eyes are closed,  
And behold no longer the sun and the stars—  
What are they to the face of my beloved?  
Yet would I not exchange my sorrow for king's treasures.

*Richard Leigh*

# The House of the Wicked

A STORY OF ADVENTURE AND INTRIGUE IN THE FAR EAST

By Eleanor Gates and Frederick Moore

## XIV

WHEN Weatherbee returned to his filing, Noakes joined him in the task, working from the corridor side of the wire screening. The girl, wearing a black, ankle-length dress, was keeping watch of the closed tray windows aft.

"Don't take time to file all the way through a wire," was Weatherbee's first suggestion to Noakes. "In one of the cabins we've got a bunch of golf sticks. Just start a break in each wire, and I'll do the rest with the business end of a brassy."

They made rapid progress. Presently they rested. Everywhere in the ship there was absolute quiet, as if not a living soul were aboard her. Weatherbee and Noakes exchanged a grin. The mate's grin was all satisfaction. The other man was amused at the picture that his companion made.

The latter resembled a faithful terrier. Over his eyes hung his dank, drab hair; but that thin, bony face of his, split from side to side, far from appearing homely to Weatherbee, seemed at that moment to wear a strange beauty.

Once more the files worked. When the wires were half cut through, for three feet on the perpendicular, Weatherbee went for the clubs, and used them on the weakened strands with good effect. No blows were struck, but the clubs were used to wrench the wires in two, until a straight opening was made all the way down to the deck.

Next, both on their feet, the men began to file horizontally at shoulder height in the direction of Stone. As fast as a wire was half severed, a golf club, with other wires for leverage, broke it through. Thus went on, feverishly, and with no unnecessary word, the alternate filing and breaking.

The horizontal cutting done, Weatherbee, using all his strength, pushed with his body

against the rectangle of heavy woven material. It gave, swinging outward stiffly, and he went through, fetching with him a folded deck chair, into which, still without speaking, the two placed Stone.

Then they began their filing on the screened wall on the opposite side of the corridor. By this time they had evolved a sort of technique in their labor. Ellice Loring brought them each a glass of water. They gulped it down, but refused the biscuits she offered. Their first consideration was her liberty.

Soon two sides of a rectangle were cut through, and the second mat of wire was pulled outward and tied back. However, they urged the newly freed prisoner not to leave her compartment.

"Keep out of the line of fire," Weatherbee warned. "The corridor is the risky place. We have nothing to do now but stand guard, so you won't be needed. Please keep back, and, if firing begins, lie down."

Then, standing shoulder to shoulder, but watching in opposite directions, the two men held a whispered conference. Noakes was for quick action, urging that they must not wait until the water supply was exhausted; nor was it desirable to let the present situation stand through another night.

"I agree absolutely," Weatherbee told him; "not only for the reasons you give, but for another—and it's a grave one. Have you noticed Mr. Houghton? His nerves are ready to snap. Right now he's jabbering to himself. Noakes, if he can't have relief from this strain, we're going to have a sick man on our hands."

"What's our first move, then?" the mate inquired.

"I think we ought to come to terms with Markin and Blodgett. They're sitting up

there waiting for us. We're waiting down here for them. Isn't it the Good Book that says something about vultures staying where their carrion is? Our friends outside are the vultures. They'll never go back to Manila with gossip about this terrible business floating around; but before they strike for foreign parts, they'll want some of Stone's money. While we've got him, we're safe from the dynamite."

Again Houghton was talking to himself in a low monotone. Noakes shook a dubious head.

"Bargain, Mr. Weatherbee," he urged.

Weatherbee went to crouch in front of Stone.

"Your game is up," he told him. "Yatin, one of the Malays you left in this ship got away, managed to return to Manila, and went to a friend of Mr. Houghton's."

Stone's bald head wobbled.

"Yatin—in—Manila?" he repeated slowly.

"Not a dream of yours," Weatherbee returned. "Mr. Houghton's friend has Yatin and Dow in the same bungalow. That's how Noakes came to be here. That's how he came to hand Markin a forged letter. Try to realize this—Manila knows the whole story."

Stone swallowed.

"That means, whether we live or whether we die, you can never go back there and be free. To-day, there's just one thing you can save out of the mess you've made of things. You can't save your money, or your reputation, or your friends—just your miserable life."

The millionaire did not speak for a moment. He appeared to be overwhelmed. He lowered his swimming eyes to the matting, until his little pointed beard rested on the silk pleats of his shirt bosom.

He roused himself when Ellice Loring came to stand in front of him, and lifted his chin to show his teeth at her in a leer of hate.

"How strange!" she said to him, her voice even and cold. "You've always been able to buy your way into, and out of, everything; but now your money isn't any good!"

She laughed mirthlessly. He did not answer her, but seemed to be thinking.

For a moment she waited, looking down at him, her manner calm—though, as Weatherbee knew, she was only outwardly calm. In those black eyes, burning now

as he had never before seen them burn, was the glow of an overwhelming satisfaction. He understood it. She was more free than she had been for what had been to her a lifetime, while her tormentor was a helpless prisoner.

"Give me a pistol, Mr. Weatherbee," she said quietly.

At that, the millionaire writhed in his chair.

"She wants to murder me, Mr. Weatherbee," he declared. "If you give her a pistol, and she kills me, my blood will be on your hands!"

She laughed again scornfully.

"Oh, the coward!" she taunted. "A man is bad enough when he's a villain; but to be a cowardly villain! No wonder he could lock us up in this ship without hearing one word of explanation, or getting one thing against us! The cruel are *always* cowards! You despicable creature!"

As before, Stone addressed Weatherbee.

"If she kills me, you won't have a chance of getting out of here alive—not one of you! Mind what I tell you! Money's the only thing that'll make Markin and Captain Blodgett come to terms. If I'm dead, and they can't gain anything from me, they'll kill every last one of you, and get away with the schooner and the yacht!"

"Mr. Weatherbee," the girl interposed, with quiet determination, "I'm satisfied to go if he must go too."

"If we have to go," Weatherbee answered, "we'll certainly take him along."

Until now he had not thought of searching Stone for firearms. Finding in a hip pocket a small automatic with an ornate handle, he handed it to her.

In spite of the argument he had just given them, Stone was plainly apprehensive as to what she might do with the weapon.

"I—I need a stimulant," he whispered huskily to Weatherbee. "These ropes hurt me. I—I want to lie down."

Once more she laughed.

"The baby act," she told Weatherbee.

He shared her uncomplimentary estimate of Stone's tactics.

"Now give me your close attention," he said to the millionaire. "What we want is to get out of the Tai-Lan. Your hired men upstairs have the bulge on us, but you heard what I said through the port to Markin, and what I said just now. I mean every word of it. If we don't get away



safe, *you* don't get away with your life. You must decide in the next two minutes whether you want to live or die!"

Stone had a question.

"What did Markin mean about blowing up the ship?"

From out of the dimness where Noakes was watchfully crouched there came a grunt of anger and disgust.

"Say!" exploded the mate. "If the old duck ain't trying to make us believe that he didn't order that clockwork!"

"I don't know of any clockwork," protested the millionaire hotly. "Clockwork for what?"

Weatherbee briefly explained the so-called "insurance."

"And it's hardly likely," he concluded, "that there's a lot of explosives in the hold unless your money paid for them, and you ordered them put there. The clockwork is the apex of deviltry, and, now that we've got you in our hands, I don't wonder you deny the whole vile business!"

Stone had been shaking his head all the while.

"I didn't buy any powder or dynamite," he reiterated. "So help me God, I didn't! I know my life is in your hands. I'm not lying to you. This talk of clockwork's all new to me. You see how comfortably this saloon is arranged. Houghton and my wife can't deny they've been well treated; and I didn't have to fear about the desertion of the men who were in on the secret, or about their telling on me. I was paying every one of them more than handsomely. I was—"

Weatherbee cut him short.

"Doesn't matter who put the dynamite in the hold," he asserted, "so long as you paid for the job. That makes you responsible. Yatin said it's there, and I'm dead sure it's there. It's a danger every second. We want to get away from it, and so do you; so you'd better coöperate with us."

"What do you want me to do?"

"In the first place," Weatherbee answered, "I want you to tell them that a single bullet aimed against us will be your death. That's the first thing you must tell them."

"And put some kick into what you say, old feller," broke in Noakes. "It's the solemn truth—one shot from that pair, and it's ta-ta for you!"

"We want Markin to come down, with his hands in the air," Weatherbee con-

tinued. "Before he starts, we want Blodgett to tie Markin's hands."

"He'll never do that," Stone complained fretfully. "You're demanding what's utterly unreasonable!"

"Next," added Weatherbee, "we want Blodgett to come down, with his hands up."

"He won't consent, either. It's sheer lunacy to ask such a thing!"

"Aw, cut that stuff!" ordered Noakes. "You make things happen for us, and you make 'em happen *pronto*! If any trick is pulled on us, I'll skin the hide off your mean little body!"

"You'll come with me to the foot of the stairs," directed Weatherbee. "I'll have a gun pointed straight at your head; so don't try to get away, will you?"

"What do you intend to do to Markin and my captain?"

"Leave them here, nicely trussed, and tell the men of the *Lillebonne* to come and get them when the *Arcadia*, with the five of us aboard, is hull down on the horizon."

"I'm to go with you?"

"With us."

"You're going to let them go scot-free, and hold me up to abuse and shame? It isn't just!"

"He talks of justice!" Ellice Loring exclaimed bitterly.

"You're the man we're after," Weatherbee said. "You took men who were more or less helpless because they were in your power, and compelled them to do your dirty work. That's why we're going to give them a chance for their freedom—if they play straight with us. But you—"

He paused significantly. Stone began to storm at him.

"Oh, all right! You've got me, haven't you? Four against one old man! It's contemptible! To make me bargain for my life!"

"You gave *me* no chance to bargain!" reminded Ellice Loring. "A rich, powerful old man against a helpless, ignorant, broken-hearted girl!"

He lifted his red-rimmed eyes to her.

"Ellice," he quavered, "if you'll forgive me, and let me go away with Markin and the captain, I'll turn most of my money over to you."

"Money! Money! Money!" she retorted. "Money can *never* make this right. There's nothing that can make up for what you've done to me. If you had gone crazy with jealousy and killed me

with this pistol—well, that would have been human, I suppose, even if it was undeserved; but deliberately to have this saloon made ready as a living tomb for Will Houghton and me!”

Houghton shot to his feet, and they heard him mumble to himself; but he did not turn, and presently sat again. Then they heard him laugh.

“Stone,” resumed Weatherbee, “your appealing to this mistreated young woman isn’t going to help you. I don’t intend to have any more delay. Will you do what I’ve told you to do, or won’t you?”

“Yes!” blurted the millionaire, and cursed under his breath.

“Good!”

“But give me a drink, will you?” pleaded Stone.

“No—we haven’t any water to spare. However, there’s plenty in the ship. You’ll get some of it when we’re in command, and not a second before.”

“All right! All right!” Stone replied irritably. “You’ll have to untie my feet.”

Weatherbee loosened the piece of rope that bound the millionaire ankle to ankle. Then he helped Stone to stand.

“Walk to the foot of the stairs,” he instructed, “and call up. Make it clear to them that we’ll punish treachery instantly. Second, point out that your life is in our hands. Third, explain how they’re to come down, and what our intentions are as regards them. Now, get along!”

Stone ground his teeth, but he moved down the corridor—slowly, as if he were stiffened from being tied. Weatherbee walked directly behind him, keeping watch ahead over that bald pate.

Its owner did not wait until the bottom step was reached before shouting loudly for Markin.

“Nick!” he called. “Captain Blodgett! Come and hear what I’ve got to say! Hey, up there, you two! Where are you, I say? Get on the job!”

The skipper’s voice answered:

“What’s wanted, chief?”

“These people,” Stone replied, “inform me that Yatin got away and Dow is a prisoner in Manila. This mate, Noakes, that you shipped, is Houghton’s best friend. Right now, in Manila, the whole story is public property—and that’s what I get out of trusting the pair of you!”

At that, two voices mingled in an exclamation that told of dismay and horror.

“You know what that means,” the millionaire added. “You two can’t go back. You must get away.”

Weatherbee gently touched the gray-covered shoulder with the stubby barrel of his automatic.

“Don’t drag this thing,” he warned. “You get over the stuff I told you to—not information for them!”

The next moment he understood, and not without dismay and horror of his own, that he had made a grave mistake in admitting to Stone that the true story of the Tailandan’s whereabouts had gained publicity, and in thus cutting off the millionaire from all hope; for the latter, speaking to Markin and Blodgett again, had that to say which Weatherbee felt would surely spell the end of them all.

With a forward step, Stone shouted his words:

“Boys! Boys! Before you get away, *blow this damned ship up!*”

## XV

WEATHERBEE clamped a hand over Stone’s mouth, but the old man’s smothered yells went on:

“Blow it up—me with it! Won’t go back—Bilibid Prison—die first! Nick! Blow—”

It was Noakes who, darting forward, jerked the millionaire off his feet, dragged him down the corridor, and, as if he had been a sack of meal, tossed him back into the folding chair.

“You tricky old rattlesnake!” he cried, scarlet with rage. “I’m goin’ to kill you for that!”

Stone, panting with excitement, glared up at him malevolently.

“I’m glad to go!” he shouted. “I’ll take every one of you with me! Turn loose your dynamite, Markin! I’ve got ’em where I want ’em! I can’t go back—neither can they! Let the thing go, Blodgett! Let it go-o-o-o!”

His voice broke into a shrill, triumphant cackle.

“You’ll get somethin’ worse ’n blowin’ up!” vowed the furious mate. “What did we promise you if you played us dirt?” He shook Stone as if he were shaking a rat. “I’m goin’ to skin you alive! I’m goin’ to start in right now!”

Noakes stuffed a hand into a breeches pocket, but Weatherbee, halting beside him, interposed.

"No, no!" he said hurriedly. "Wait! Shut him up."

Back he ran then, to the foot of the companionway, taking care to keep close to a wire wall.

Stone broke out once more.

"Better blow us up, Markin! They know you killed a man in Shanghai! They'll see that you hang! They'll—"

"Darn your hide, I'll stop your jabber!" growled Noakes.

Around his own waist was a stringy length of gray cloth that served him as a cummerbund. With it he bound Stone's mouth. Then, using the rope once more, he tied the old man, by his knees and his elbows, to the folding chair.

"There you stay till I send you where you can't come back," he added. "So just take your last look at the scenery, won't you? The next place you're goin' to 'll be even hotter 'n this!"

Houghton was still seated by the table. Though he continued to watch the stairs, he seemed not to have heard Stone's treacherous order, or seen the millionaire dragged away by the mate. Constantly he whispered to himself. Occasionally he chuckled aloud.

Elice Loring was laughing, too. She came to stand in front of Stone.

"He surprises me," she confessed. "I never would have thought he had enough spirit in his base little body to face being blown up!"

From where he was standing, Weatherbee could hear Markin and the skipper talking at one and the same time—proof that Stone's orders had stirred them. So that the pair could catch what he said, Weatherbee now called back to the girl and Noakes.

"They won't blow us up," he asserted, as if fully confident. "They know that what I've told them is so. If Stone dies, how'll they get theirs? Ha-a-a! He's only valuable to them if he's alive, and they're more worried about his safety than we are. I dare them to do any blowing!"

"Mr. Weatherbee!" It was the voice of Markin, his tone mollifying once more. "The captain and me, we *are* worried about the chief. He must be off his head. Why, he *knows* we wouldn't let anything happen to him! Tell him we don't mean to desert him—not for a minute!"

"Not until you've had some cash, eh?" Weatherbee bantered pointedly.

But they were not to be taunted into admitting that they would forsake Stone under any circumstances.

"We want to get the boss out of his fix," spoke up Blodgett. "Name your proposition."

"To begin with," Weatherbee answered, "I want to say a word or two about your getting away with either vessel, or both. Don't try it. It would mean disaster. This story has been wirelessly from Manila to every ship on the Eastern seas, and to every radio station on the globe. Right now the yacht and the Lillebonne are being hunted."

Blodgett spoke again.

"I'm not exactly a fool, Mr. Weatherbee," he said dryly. "We know we'd run into a coast guard. We don't even think of jumping out—honest, we don't. We want to do the decent thing. I've got a family, I have. I can't give up the sea and stop supporting 'em just because Mr. Stone has had troubles with Mrs. Stone."

"Now you're talking!" returned Weatherbee. "As I understand it, what you'd both like is a ship to get away in, a good sum to take with you, and the absolute assurance that you won't be brought up short and arrested. Am I right?"

"You've got it about right," said Blodgett, and Markin threw in his assent eagerly; but, as if it were a second thought, Blodgett added: "How about Mr. Stone, though?"

"When we're aboard the yacht," said Weatherbee, "you can send a boat, and Mr. Stone will go back to you in it."

"So far, so good," Markin called down; "but if he was to fall sick, and we lost him—"

"We'll give you a letter which we'll all sign," went on Weatherbee. "In it we'll commend you both for your past services, and so on. With it you shall have a bill of sale for the Lillebonne, signed by Mr. Stone and Mrs. Stone."

At that, the millionaire began to twist and murmur his protests, all the while shaking his head vigorously. It was evident that he would sign nothing unless forcibly compelled.

"That 'll do!" warned Noakes. "If I give you a taste of my foot, there won't be no slipper on it—it 'll be inside a shoe!"

Markin replied to Weatherbee's plan.

"But," he argued, "Mrs. Stone is supposed to be dead. She went down in the



Tai-Lan. If she signed, nobody'd believe it, and we'd be snagged."

"All right, then," answered Weatherbee. "Stone will sign it alone."

"If you force him to sign"—it was Blodgett who spoke—"will the bill of sale be legal? And who's going to witness it, and stand by *that*? Who's—"

"Blast you for a brace of sea lawyers!" Noakes roared at them. "Can't we wireless from the yacht that Mrs. Stone's alive, and that Stone give you the Lilly? Of all the gall! You offer 'em a fortune, Mr. Weatherbee, and they hum and haw!"

"Not at a-a-all!" Markin denied. "But look here—it'll take money to pay off the schooner's crew, and to pay port charges in case we make any ports of call, and to provision her. We can't get hung up for want of cash. The chief might come aboard us sick, and we want to be sure we can get what we want. Do we get it?"

"You do," agreed Weatherbee.

"It's a go!" Blodgett answered back. "Give us what we want, and we'll shove off in the dinghy five minutes from now. That'll leave you the longboat."

"You'll surely play fair with us?" asked Weatherbee. "When you've got what you want, do you mean to keep your word?"

"We'll keep our word, all right," Blodgett promised. "Don't we all want to get out of this mess—you one way, we the other? Ain't you got the chief? If we don't play straight, it'll go hard with him, won't it? We're thinking of him. We want to do our best for him."

"I wonder!" exclaimed Weatherbee. "How do we know that you'll do your best for him *after* you've got all you want? You might let him blow up."

Now Markin's voice took on an injured tone.

"We let the ship blow up with Mr. Stone? You mean to say you don't trust us to treat *him* square?"

"Don't trust you to treat anybody square," Weatherbee replied coolly; "not even each other."

"But what could we gain if we was to act crooked?" demanded the captain.

"You'd gain extra money—big money—if you could get him out safe and finish us off."

After that, for a time, there was no more conversing between social hall and dining saloon; but from above, to those waiting in the dimness below, came the voices of Mar-

kin and the skipper. They were arguing, low and excitedly.

Presently, as if he had heard them and was growing impatient, Houghton sprang up out of his chair for a second time. However, as if he had changed his mind, he immediately sat down again. Weatherbee noted that the elder man was breathing hard.

The incident helped to increase Weatherbee's impatience.

"There's no use backing and filling," he told the two overhead. "Here's what's got to happen—Markin, let the skipper tie your hands. Then hoist them over your head, and come down. The captain is to get into the dinghy next, and pull out to where we can see him. Then, Markin, before we give you the letter, or the bill of sale, or anything else, you've got to show me how to run that clockwork. You've got to stay with me in the hand-wheel house until I'm dead certain that what you've taught me is correct."

Markin's answer was made with a great pretense of earnestness:

"Now, Mr. Weatherbee! You don't ask me to come down there with my hands tied, do you? You'd nab me. It would mean Bilibid Prison for life. Why, I'd be a fool to do what you ask! What could Blodgett, here, do by himself? No, you can't call that plan fair; but if you folks mean what you're saying, what's the matter with one of you coming up here? You're three to us two. Also, you got Mr. Stone, so you got a hostage, and we ain't. We *can't* play you crooked. We *got* to learn you the insurance machine. When that's O. K., you hand us what you just promised, and we'll sheer off, to wait for the chief."

As Weatherbee half turned away from the steps, here was Houghton on his feet once more. To the surprise of the former, he beckoned Weatherbee to join him at the opening in the wire netting. When they came together there, he appeared to be in his usual quiet, self-contained state of mind.

"Is he smoldering?" Weatherbee asked himself. "Or has he actually got his nerves in hand?"

"I see Markin's point of view," Houghton said. "I suggest that one of us go up to be taught that mechanism."

Weatherbee hesitated. He remembered how double-faced the commander of the Tai-Lan had proved to be in his own case. He feared treachery. If one of their three



were cut down, then the numerical odds would no longer be in favor of those in the saloon, and the possibility of victory would be greatly lessened.

On the other hand, it was Houghton who had endured this prison so long. How could a man who had been locked up in it for only one night refuse to take a step that might free them all? Moreover, now that the elder man was restored to his poise of the evening before, Weatherbee dreaded to refuse any wish of his, or reject any proposal.

Houghton was watching the other's face.

"It's the only reasonable step," he added, gently argumentative.

"I'll go," said Weatherbee.

At once there was strong objection, not solely on the part of Houghton and Noakes, but also from Ellice Loring.

"I sponsored this move," Houghton pointed out. "If there's any risk involved, I ought to take it. I can't see the job loaded upon another's man's shoulders."

Weatherbee would not consent.

"Impossible for you to go," he declared. "Your eyes won't stand the glare of the light up there."

"Don't make me feel as if I'd started a war," pleaded Houghton, "and then stationed myself at a mahogany desk!"

"Can't help it. What's the use of your going, Houghton, if you're blind and helpless when you get there?"

Houghton's retort was a strange one. However, it was not until several hours afterward that Weatherbee was able to understand the full significance of the other's attitude.

"If I can't go up there," Houghton asserted, "then nobody ought to go—nobody. Anyhow, I could put off going until after sunset."

"We don't want to stay here another night, old man."

"Sure we don't," Noakes concurred; "but, Mr. Weatherbee, this job is for me, Mr. Houghton's eyes bein' like they are."

"You've got a family," Weatherbee countered. "I haven't."

"I got a family," admitted the mate, "but I'm goin' to do this anyhow. Remember, I'm the only one of the lot down here that's got what you might call an official position. I'm mate of the *Lillebonne*, and Blodgett knows that if I'm killed, somebody's got to answer for it. Somebody's got to stand up and say *why*."

Weatherbee saw that there were tears in Ellice Loring's eyes.

"I don't want any of you to go," she told him. "I'm afraid. I feel it won't turn out right. Oh, I know you're all thinking of me, but I can't have anybody sacrifice himself! Please don't trust those men!"

"I'm sorry to see you so troubled," Weatherbee told her, "when I'm sure we're all overemphasizing the risk. They've got to play straight with us, those two. Haven't we got Stone?"

"Mr. Weatherbee," she answered, "they'd shoot you down, and feel certain that we wouldn't shoot him down. Oh, I know how that kind of person, who hasn't any sense of honor, depends on *your* sense of honor, and your decency and humanity. Don't trust them!"

"You and me'll draw straws," broke in the mate, speaking to Weatherbee; "or wires, or slivers, or whatever we got layin' around. That 'll settle the question."

"Good idea!" Weatherbee exclaimed. "Houghton, take a couple of your playing cards, and mark one. Miss Loring, we'll turn away while you lay them face down for us. The man who gets the marked one—"

As the cards were placed in the girl's hands, he noticed that she was deadly pale. Knowing how apprehensive she was, and being eager to get done with the strain, he turned away hastily, taking Noakes with him.

She dropped to the matting and laid the cards face down.

"Ready!" she announced huskily.

She remained on her knees, staring at the bits of pasteboard.

"You draw first, Mr. Weatherbee," said the mate.

Weatherbee stooped, picked up a card, turned it over, and laid it down again.

"Tuh!" he breathed.

He had drawn the blank.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Noakes, plainly delighted.

In another instant he held up the marked card in triumph.

As if she were about to faint, the girl swayed sidewise. Weatherbee bent quickly and lifted her to her feet. As he held her firmly, she looked up at him, her lips trembling pitifully, though she was trying to smile.

"We'll be out of this soon," he told her

reassuringly. "Keep up your courage a little longer. Trust us!"

"Lady"—Noakes, a weapon in either hand, was pausing for one moment to say a final word to her—"I'm mighty glad I'm doin' this clockwork job. If anything happens, you can spare me a lot better'n you can spare Mr. Weatherbee."

He nodded, traversed the corridor in a series of long, scuffling steps, halted at the foot of the companionway, laid his firearms on the bottom step, gave another laugh, a backward toss of his long hair, and took the stairs two at a time.

### XVI

THE mate's lanky body rose beyond the range of those who were left watching. Next, only his gangling legs could be seen, and then only the bare feet in the slippers. When he seemed to be pausing for a moment, close to the top, those below heard the report of a revolver, and a choking cry that was his.

He sank to the step on which he was standing, turned, crouching, and began his descent, his body doubled, his left hand steadying and supporting him. On his breast, where his sweated white shirt clung, there was a small crimson spot.

The three in the dining saloon echoed his cry—in pity, horror, dismay, fear, and anger.

He shook his head at them, waved them to stay where they were, straightened at the foot of the staircase, picked up the pistols he had left behind him, and started back. He reeled slightly, but the display of strength he was making led the others to hope that, after all, he had not been mortally wounded.

Weatherbee met him, and saw how bloodless was that bony, bristling face; yet a smile showed the gap in the mate's teeth—a curious smile, however, like that of a man who is enjoying a joke which is, for the present, solely his own.

"Light made a glare in my eyes," he explained, whispering. "I brung up, and—Markin got me."

For a little while he fought to keep his feet, his arms hanging limply, but his weapons still gripped in his long fingers. Then he allowed Weatherbee and Houghton to lower him to the deck, where he sat with his back against a wire wall. His face was toward Stone.

To stanch the mate's wound, Houghton

tore away a sleeve of his own shirt, doubled the cloth, and held it against the slowly heaving chest. Weatherbee went for water and towels. The girl knelt to brush the long, drab hair out of those yellowish eyes.

"Lady," he said to her, "would you go and play on the piano for me? Wish you'd play 'How Firm a Foundation,' and play it loud. You know—good and strong on the bass part, man fashion. Sing it, too."

"Yes!"

She was up and into her side of the saloon on the instant. Then through the big, dim room, in marching rhythm, the music of the hymn began to pour:

"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith in His excellent word!  
What more can He say—"

Weatherbee came back, but Noakes would not drink. He was staring at Stone.

"You folks 'll need every drop of water you got," he declared.

His expression caused Weatherbee to glance toward the old man. He saw that, above the windings of the mate's stringy cummerbund, the millionaire's milky-glue eyes were laughing.

Ellice Loring was singing on:

"Fear not, I am with thee; oh, be not dismayed!  
I, I am thy God, and will still give thee aid.  
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand—"

Suddenly the mate's right arm was no longer limp. It lifted aimlessly. In the right hand was an automatic that wavered.

To Weatherbee it seemed, for that second, that Noakes was blindly trying to hand some one his weapon; but that was not the mate's intention. With one supreme drain upon his waning strength, he lifted his arm level with his shoulder, straightened it, and fired—twice.

Stone's eyes started, and he jerked backward from the double impact. A few feet away, with the piano and her own soaring voice to drown the sound of the shots, Ellice Loring, newly widowed, but not knowing it, bent intently over her keys and swept the marching hymn onward:

"When through the deep waters I call thee to go,  
The rivers of woe shall not overflow;  
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,  
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress."

She stopped.

"How is he?" she asked under her breath.

Getting no answer, she came hurrying out again.

Noakes was whispering.

"They was told plain enough that if they shot at us, we'd kill him. They think our bark is worse'n our bite; but it ain't. Lady, he was tied, and I wasn't armed—that makes things even, don't it? Anyhow, as the Malays say, he was one of the pig tribe."

She did not understand, and did not look to where Stone was slumped in the chair, his chin once more on his breast.

"Lady," the dying mate went on, "I want to ask if you'll say to Mr. Bradley that I done my best, and will he please remember Nettie and the—the kid?"

"I'll tell him. I thank you for all you've done with my whole heart. I'll remember your wife and baby. I'll do everything I can for them—believe that!"

Around his mouth was a curious little pleased quirk.

"Fine!" he pronounced. "And so, like some general once said, I can die happy. You're rich, lady—"

"I don't want his money!"

"You earned it these last fourteen months," Noakes reminded her. "So take it; and you won't mind me sayin' that this time you've sure picked a good man—the right one. That's O. K., and now—Stone's gone, and—I'll—fol-low—"

It was then that she got a hint of the truth. She turned toward Stone, saw, understood, and backed away a few feet. Against a wire partition she halted, breathless and stunned.

Noakes did not speak again. The pale lashes dropped slowly to rest upon his thin cheeks. His lips met, but lifted at either end in a faint smile. He gave a last sigh.

Weatherbee pocketed the mate's weapons, then took Houghton aside.

"Our situation has changed for the worse in these last five minutes," he said soberly. "We've lost one pair of hands and our hostage; but we've still got a chance for our lives, if we can keep Stone's death a secret."

Houghton threw back his head and burst into a gale of laughter.

## XVII

WEATHERBEE turned back to where the girl was standing, rigid, as if the shock of the double tragedy had robbed her of motion. As he halted beside her, poignant

and stressful as was that moment, he was startled by the beauty of her face. An oval of delicately chiseled marble, it was more than ever like the face of some high-born girl of the Middle Ages. Once more he had the feeling that all this that was happening was unreal—the dream of some hideously cruel plot.

He gently touched her arm. Without turning her eyes toward him, she began to whisper:

"I didn't deserve my punishment. Oh, I didn't! He knows that now; but I never wanted him to pay like that—without warning, without a chance to repent!"

He took a small hand that was waxen, holding it firmly.

"You couldn't be harsh to anybody," he said soothingly. "You're everything that's kind and good. You mustn't suffer because that old man has gone as he has. Poor Noakes was thinking of you. He wanted to set you free. You are free. Have you thought of that?"

She shook her head.

"No, I—I hadn't thought. I'm free! How strange that I didn't think of it!"

"Not strange," he declared; "because there was never in your thoughts the wish to get yourself free through Stone's death. You couldn't even think death for your worst enemy."

Her face softened, and she turned brimming eyes to Weatherbee.

"How kind all that sounds!" she said.

"I like to hear you say it."

"We don't know how matters are going to turn out," he went on. "There are other things I want to say to you while I can. First, I must thank you for what you did for me."

She was puzzled.

"For you?"

"What Noakes got is what I would have got if I'd gone up. You were right about them. You told us they wouldn't play straight. As far as you could, you tried to save me from being shot down."

"I'm the cause of your being here in this danger."

"Thank God that I'm on hand to fight for you! And I want to tell you how proud I am, and how terribly happy I am, to know that you cared about my safety."

She nodded.

"Yes, I care," she acknowledged. "Every moment I pray that we shall succeed in getting away from here safely to—"



gether. Am I wicked to do that, with this man dead here, in sight of me?"

"You don't owe him any loyalty," Weatherbee answered.

"And—and I long for a little happiness again!"

"If we come through this alive, I'll spend the rest of my life making you happy."

"I'll think of that. It'll keep up my courage."

"Markin and Blodgett mustn't even guess what has happened," Weatherbee told her. "They must believe that Stone is alive, and that we hold the whip hand. If you didn't hear those two shots, then they didn't. Will you go in and play again?"

As obediently as a child, she returned to the piano. She played a vivacious gavot, followed it with a Chopin polonaise, and then swept into a gay two-step.

While the music continued, Weatherbee went to lean over the mate. He took both weapons from the hold of those long, thin fingers, and laid flat the angular body in its faded gingham shirt and dungaree trousers. Once he had thought this figure like some awful caricature. He had hated the sight of this countenance, which now, calm and serenely smiling, was so singularly ennobled by death.

The music changed to a spirited march. The stirring rhythm brought Houghton to his feet, so abruptly that Weatherbee felt a new and overwhelming disquiet. Now, in their great extremity, was Houghton about to prove himself a danger to his companions in distress?

"Or perhaps he'll rush up and out," Weatherbee thought, "and get himself shot."

The elder man had a pistol in either hand, but what he did was only grotesque. Without leaving his station at the table, he fell to exercising himself—first his arms, then his whole body, bending this way and that.

The music stopped. He sat, laid his automatic down, smoothed at his hair, and looked about him as if the table were circled by diners.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began affably, and stopped.

"Yes," said Weatherbee. "What is it, Mr. Houghton?"

"Nothing!"

But immediately he was speaking again:

"Treachery—the very worst kind of

treachery! Well, talk won't settle it. No, my friends, talk won't settle it."

He gestured with both hands.

The piano was playing once more, and now the music was low and lulling. Weatherbee recognized the strains of an old cradle song.

"What a wonder of a girl!" he said to himself. "What a clever idea! And if only it'll work!"

To a certain extent, it did. As the melody progressed, Ellice's low, rich voice joining in with the piano, Houghton let his eyes fall to the matting. Presently he planted both elbows on the board, cupped his hands, and rested his face in them.

Understanding that the girl was aware of Houghton's condition, Weatherbee now determined to speak to her about it, since a failure to be frank in this particular matter might cause her to feel that other important things were being hidden from her. Such a feeling might fill her mind with unfounded fears, when there were enough actual perils to be faced.

He came to her.

"You've noticed Mr. Houghton?" he asked.

Ellice continued to play softly as she replied.

"Yes," she said sorrowfully. "He has kept up all this long time, and he has kept me up. I've probably leaned on him harder than I ever intended to. It has told on him. Also, he's naturally proud, and to be misjudged and mistreated has weighed on his heart. The first time I noticed that he was different was when poor Noakes whistled to us. Since then it has been a steady, gradual collapse. He's half crazy now."

"Raving a while back," Weatherbee assented. "Poor old fellow—a dead game sport, and every inch a gentleman! If he lives, he's probably in for a long siege of brain trouble. This kind of music helps him. Keep it going. I've got to build a barricade."

He built it out of folding chairs—a waist-high pile placed near to the foot of the stairs. To make it more bullet-proof, he layered it with blankets, and with Houghton's many suits of clothes. From time to time he paused long enough to make sure that Markin and Blodgett were still arguing overhead.

The barrier completed, Weatherbee noticed that Houghton was looking out at it. Presently the elder man came to stand close



to the wire screen. His face was drawn. A heavy fold of skin showed at either side of his mouth, as between his parted lips his clenched teeth were revealed in a weird smile. Despite the close heat of the saloon, that smile made Weatherbee shiver.

"Take it easy for a while," he pleaded. "You know you've been down in this hole so long, and it has taxed you."

Houghton's eyes avoided his.

"Rest isn't for me until this affair is finished," he returned.

He spoke quietly enough, but his tone showed that a terrible anger was consuming him, and making self-control difficult. Weatherbee thought it best to continue their conversation.

"I suppose we ought to get poor Noakes and the old man into one of the cabins on your side," he observed.

Houghton's brows knitted.

"No, that would take the two of us, and while we were busy we might be fired on."

"You're right."

Weatherbee was glad to be able to agree. He recalled that it is not wise to oppose a man who is on the brink of frenzy.

"What a foul thing they did to that good lad!" Houghton exclaimed. "Set a deliberate trap! Never intended to keep their word! Enticed him up and shot him down as if he were some stray dog!"

"Cold-blooded!" Once more Weatherbee hastened to concur. "Well, now we know that they will give no quarter, so neither shall we."

"Thank you for saying that," returned the other. "I've been afraid you might insist on ethics during the coming fracas."

Houghton gazed straight at his companion. His eyes were open, eager, inflamed.

"They probably know for sure that they hit Noakes," Weatherbee went on. "They can't be certain he was seriously hurt. With the piano going, they surely won't think he's dead. As a wounded enemy is a bad proposition to deal with, I fancy they'll go slow for a bit."

"And not talk bargain again."

"Not right away. They can afford to sit tight and play a waiting game. Time is on their side. They know we have some water. They also know that we're bound to run out of it. Then we'll go after them, or give up. What I'm counting on, though, is that they won't want Stone to die."

"They won't care, if it brings about our surrender."

"Surrender means death," said Weatherbee. "They'd never leave us here as prisoners, because they couldn't afford to do it; and they'd never turn us loose. They shot Noakes because their one idea is to clean us out."

Houghton drew a deep breath.

"If only we could lure them down!"

"What do you say if we beg them for water—for Stone?"

"That wouldn't fetch 'em."

"Would you mind if I tried?"

"Go ahead."

"I just want to see how they'll act," Weatherbee explained. "Can't do any harm, and it'll make 'em think we're harder pressed than we are."

He signaled the piano to stop.

From behind the heaped-up chairs Weatherbee began a second parley with their enemies.

"Markin!" he shouted. "Blodgett! You up there! I want to speak to you!"

"Yes, Mr. Second Mate," Blodgett answered. "What is it you want to say? Sing out!"

"So you're still sober!" Weatherbee retorted boldly. "Well, I want to say that we're out of water. Your employer hasn't had a drop since he came down. He, and all of us, must have some. He's about down and out already."

"Short o' water, eh?" remarked the captain. "Well, you don't sound thirsty, and neither does our musical young lady; but we can spare you some, I guess. Come up and get it!"

"I think I won't do that," said Weatherbee, as if good-naturedly entering into the ghastly joke. "Suppose you send some down!"

"Right-oh! By the way, Mr. Second Mate, how's our friend Noakes? You know, I didn't mean to hurt him bad. I was just trying to scare him."

"He isn't hurt badly," Weatherbee lied cheerfully. "It's more his feelings than anything else. The bullet made a flesh wound; but it certainly got under his skin in more ways than one."

"He's cross about it, eh?"

"Pretty cross."

"All right, sonny! We'll send you down some *agua* in a jiffy. We can't let Mr. Stone want for drink."

"Thanks!"

For Houghton, as he came back, he had a word:

"The piano did more than conceal the shot. It actually fooled them into thinking that Noakes wasn't badly hurt."

Houghton swung his head solemnly.

"How wonderful of the poor lad!" he marveled. "He thought of covering the sound of his pistol, even though he was mortally stricken!"

After that, for half an hour or more, the men were silent. Believing that the piano was responsible for Houghton's apparent restoration to his normal condition, Weatherbee signed to the girl, begging her to resume her playing. As the men sat there, watching and pondering the situation, through the big, ill lighted saloon stole the soothing, comforting, homely strains of old songs—"The Suwanee River," "Kathleen Mavourneen," and "The Old Folks at Home."

Suddenly the three were startled by the sound of a crash, evidently the breaking of glass. The sound came from the social hall. It brought the piano to an abrupt stop, and drove the two men back into the deeper shadows, their pistols ready.

"They're smashing in a port," Weatherbee hazarded.

"H-m!" rumbled Houghton.

Bent far forward, as if ready and impatient for conflict, his shoulders rose and fell with his quick breathing.

Presently the reason for the crash of glass was made plain. Following a dull thud at the head of the staircase, a dark green quart bottle came falling into sight from step to step. Beside it, frolicking and romping in gay pursuit, appeared a black and white kitten.

Together, bottle and kitten reached the matting at the foot of the stairs. The bottle rolled to one side. The kitten trotted to Weatherbee's feet, where it began a plaintive mewing.

"The little thing's thirsty," Ellice Loring explained. "The kittens are used to getting their drink from me. Here's their saucer."

She came along the wire wall to the men, fetching it. Weatherbee had picked up the bottle.

"We don't have to drink any of this," he said to the others; "but if it's water, and not tea or wine, suppose we give a swallow to the cat?"

"You think it's *poisoned*?" asked the girl.

"They wouldn't poison Stone," he

argued; "but—to render us helpless, you understand—they might dope our drink. I think they have."

He drew the cork, and poured out a wine-glassful of water, which, though warm, looked clear and palatable. Then the three watched the kitten lap the saucer dry.

Almost immediately they found that the test was justified. The kitten, plainly affected by even the small allowance given it, stretched itself out on the matting and fell into a sleep so deep that, though the soft body was taken up and freely handled, the little creature did not awake.

"Dope is the word!" pronounced Houghton grimly.

"I felt it in my bones!" Weatherbee returned. He laid the limp kitten down. "And now let's make them believe their drugging scheme has worked like a charm. Let's arrange things so that when, ten minutes from now, a frightened young lady calls to that brace of hellions to come quick, because Mr. Stone and all the rest of us are dying, they'll find four men lying at intervals along the corridor. They're bound to reconnoiter from the galley end of this hall. The old man will be nearest the door, Noakes next, and you and I, Houghton, will be right here, against the barricade. We'll need to be in the shadow, for we're going to be stuffed."

The scheme delighted Houghton.

"Inspired!" he declared, and half doubled with laughter.

"May we have some more music?" Weatherbee asked.

The girl returned to her piano. The two men went at their task of setting the stage for what promised to be the final scene of the Tai-Lan's strange drama.

Not all of the work was pleasant; but even as they carried the body of the mate to his place in the corridor, and set the chair of the dead millionaire farther along, Houghton went on with that low chuckling and mumbling which, to Weatherbee, was so disquieting.

When the stuffed manikins were put in position where the light was the poorest, Houghton ceased his muttering, and silently stole to a place of concealment behind his own long table.

Meanwhile, the kitten had shown no sign of any suffering. Its breath still came and went regularly and naturally. It was warm. Weatherbee laid it just inside the screening. Beside it he set the saucer.

Ellice Loring was still playing.

"We're all set," Weatherbee told her; "but go right on with the music until I'm hidden. Then you make your terrible discovery. Be as hysterical as you like. You're sure we're all dead."

"When those two men come down, will you kill them?" she asked tremulously.

"Only wound them. They deserve to be shot, but we're going to try to save them for the cutter and the law. Now! You've gone through this last twenty-four hours like a soldier. Hold out for another fifteen minutes, little woman!"

"Count on me!"

A moment, and he was beside Houghton. Then the piano stopped in the middle of a bar, and there went up such a shriek of terror and grief as raised the hair on Weatherbee's scalp.

"He-e-elp! He-e-elp!" Without pausing for an answer, she shouted her news. "Mr. Markin! Mr. Mar-r-kin! They're dead! They're all dead! What have you done to them? O-o-o-oh!"

As her cry ended, from the well deck there came a loud laugh. A chair scraped on the plates, and shoes went pounding up a ladder and along the boat deck.

Next, a cheerful whistle sounded. Another replied. Then the three who were waiting heard two excited, happy voices.

"Think we got 'em?"

"I'll bet my hat!"

"Let's go down and see!"

"By thunder, I told you that 'd do the trick!" This was Blodgett, boastful. "Ain't you glad I fetched the stuff along?"

"I'll tell the world!"

Ellice Loring was moaning.

"They're poisoned! They're dying! Oh, come and carry them into the air! You've killed them! You've killed them!"

There was more tramping. It neared. Presently the door at the end of the corridor was opened, but not more than a few inches.

"Crimini!"

It was Markin. Through the narrow chink he had evidently caught sight of Stone's body.

"Come quick!" pleaded the girl. "They don't speak or move! Oh, what was in the water you sent down? They all drank but me. I was playing. Oh, *don't* stand there! Come and help them! Hurry!"

"Aw, shut up your rumpus!" ordered Markin rudely.

She ceased to speak; but still sobbing, and wringing her hands, she entered the door of her cabin and shut it.

Inch by inch the door at the end of the corridor swung in. Cautiously a face appeared—the full, round face of Markin. Then, pressing in beside Markin, came the captain, a pistol in each hand.

"All gone by-by!" he laughed. "Say, this is luck!"

"Count 'em!" returned Markin. "One—two—three—and the chief!"

His weapons to the fore, he stepped boldly forward, and Blodgett followed. Hastily they passed the millionaire, bent over in his chair. Close to Noakes, they halted, and the two who were watching them saw both raise their weapons.

One fired into the body of the mate, the other at the two figures lying in a lifelike huddle against the barricade—*bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!*

"Good job!" Markin observed.

Smoke filled the corridor. Through the haze could be seen his smiling countenance as he swung around.

Suddenly other shots boomed in the big room. From behind his ambuscade, yelling like a madman, and firing at every step, ran Houghton. He was not aiming to wound, but to kill. Out of his two weapons, using both hands, he was pumping through the wire screening a blast that carried death.

"Kill!" he screamed. "Kill everybody! Kill!"

Trapped, taken by surprise, Markin and Blodgett drove back toward the piled chairs, ran into each other, and fell sprawling. They tried to reply to the fire as they got to their knees. Then they flattened upon the matting.

Houghton turned, and Weatherbee, as he stood up, saw through the smoke that swirled about him a raving, brain-tortured man who was ready for another victim.

"Everybody dies!" Houghton cried hoarsely. "Everybody!"

He fired; but Weatherbee had bent himself double, and the bullet splintered the panel of a cabin door. Then, as the elder man, running amuck like a maddened Malay, threw himself against the outer side of the table, firing again, Weatherbee went under the board and caught Houghton's feet.

Down went the madman, his weapons flying from his hands. Weatherbee re-

versed his own pistol and stunned Houghton with it.

The clockwork!

It was his first thought. The living must be hurried to safety across the bamboo bridge. Taking Houghton by the shoulders, he dragged him through the opening of the wire wall.

He found Ellice Loring beside him.

"Markin's moving," she told him.

He laid Houghton down and ran to examine his fallen enemy.

"Are you badly hurt?" he asked. "I'll carry you out, if I can; but what about that dynamite? Is it safe for a while?"

Markin's eyes were closed, but he was still conscious.

"Weatherbee," he whispered, "there ain't no clockwork—never was. I started the yarn so's the help wouldn't dare turn on me." He tried to lift himself. "Weatherbee, you'll treat the chief white, won't you? He's old and—and cranky. When he wakes up, you tell him for me—"

The message had no ending.

At sunset, obeying Stone's orders of that morning, the skipper of the yacht—a large young man, clean-shaven, coarsely handsome, with bold gray eyes and an independent manner—returned to the Tai-Lan in his spick-and-span gig. Weatherbee was at the rail to receive him; and beside Weatherbee, her eyes well shielded even from the soft light of early evening, stood Ellice Loring.

"Captain," began Weatherbee, as the gig stopped her way against the stern of the longboat, "the man who has been hiring you is dead."

The man in the gig stared up.

"Mr. Stone? Why, we heard some shots up the river this morning. Could that mean—"

Briefly Weatherbee explained the happenings of the day. Then he added:

"Captain, this lady is the widow of your late employer."

The skipper lifted a hand to his visored cap, as if acknowledging an introduction.

"Ma'am," he said, "I used to see you often in Manila."

"I suppose," she returned, "that one employer is, to you, very much like another. We have a sick man lying here unconscious, who must be taken at once to the nearest doctor. The dead must have proper burial at sea. I am the owner of this vessel, and of the two anchored down the river. Are you ready and willing to give me your help?"

"Ma'am"—his bold eyes were earnest, his tone was deferential—"I'm here to obey my owner's orders."

Half an hour later, the gig, carrying the three who had been prisoners, pushed its way out of the mangroves. One in that boat looked through her happy tears upon a river she had scarcely hoped to see again, and lifted her face gratefully to a pearl-gray sky through which were glinting the first pale stars.

THE END

### THE MARCHES OF INFINITY

WHERE the last rim of nothing shrinks from sight,  
Methought I paused; earth lay so very far  
It did not even shine, a tiny star;  
The sun itself was lost in utter night;  
Our universe, a mere dewdrop of light  
Set in the heart of heaven's great sable flower,  
Shone intermittent with a feeble power,  
So distant stood my path, so weak its might.

Yet, when I thought: "The telescope need pry  
No more across the boundless stellar ways,  
For here, my soul, the end of things we see!"  
Lost in the far depths of another sky  
I beheld other banks of suns ablaze  
On flickering marches of infinity!

Harry Kemp



# Furze Hollow

A STRANGE STORY OF GYPSY MAGIC

By A. M. Burrage

**H**URLOW came to stay at the Walmley Arms, on the eastern border of Jailbury Common, for two reasons. He needed a country holiday, and by going to Jailbury he was breaking fresh ground; and the inn was within walking distance of Moffat's cottage.

Moffat was a ripe scholar and a recluse, with antiquarian tastes. Hurlow had met him on one of his first visits to London, and had been immediately attracted to the older man. Moffat was a good talker when he chose; and Hurlow, who worshiped intellect, and whose lot in life was cast among uninteresting people, hung upon his words.

The liking was mutual. Possibly Moffat was not adamant against flattery that was obviously sincere. At any rate, he said suddenly to Hurlow:

"If you're ever down my way, I would be glad if you would come and see me."

This, as Hurlow learned afterward, was a rare remark for him to make.

Hurlow himself was a man of forty who worked in a London office, and was one of those reserved, ungregarious beings who find it difficult to make friends. He was a bookworm who read unintelligently. His mind was always full of undigested letterpress. Almost his only recreation, besides reading, was to play chess. He generally spent his annual holiday walking, with a haversack half full of books. This July, however, for the reasons already stated, he settled himself on Jailbury Common.

Moffat disappointed him. He had expected the old scholar to walk miles with him every day, and to show him all the places of antiquarian interest in the neighborhood. Moffat, however, could not be persuaded to stir out of doors, and although it would not be fair to call him morose, Hurlow found it difficult to get him into a talking mood.

He spent most of his evenings at Moffat's cottage, and spent most of his days—the weather, fortunately, was fine—walking, until he knew every path, and nearly every tree and furze bush, on the great tract of common land. He also got to know several of the local peasants, whom he described as "characters."

There was Walters, head keeper on the manor estate, who enjoyed telling him amusing stories about the local worthies. There was old Granny Light, who was supposed to be well over a hundred, and to possess supernatural gifts. She had not walked for years, but during the spell of hot, fine weather she was to be seen in an armchair at her granddaughter's garden gate, white as a bone, shrunken and wrinkled, and seemingly incapable of coherent speech. Her lips moved continually in a meaningless mumble, and it was seldom that even her own kith and kin heard her speak distinctly.

It happened, on a certain moonless night, that Hurlow left Moffat's cottage at about half past eleven, and turned his face toward the Walmley Arms. He was more tired than usual, having exceeded his usual amount of walking exercise during the day. The inn was nearly two miles distant by road, but there was a short cut—a footpath which passed through two copses and over part of the common, through a dip called Furze Hollow. He knew the path by daylight, but, his sight being poor, he had not hitherto cared to trust finding his way in the dark by this shorter route. To-night weariness held out an extra inducement, and he took the footpath.

Hurlow found his way through the two copses without much difficulty, and eventually climbed the stile which brought him out on the open common in the light of the night sky. The night was bright, although

moonless, for the stars shone clearly out of a cloudless sky, and it was easy to follow the line of the path as it wound among the bushes. That part of the common was always lonely, although in the early evening one might expect to pass one or two courting couples along the path.

Hurlow had walked only some twenty paces from the edge of the copse when his progress was arrested by a sound from the bottom of the hollow, in front of him. The sound was low, thin, piercing, and almost startlingly sweet.

He came abruptly to a halt. He knew instinctively that these shrill, reedy notes were the music of pipes, and the environment lent magic to the sound. There in the dark, under the steadfast stars, the music shrilled and softened, and shrilled again. In such places and to such notes had Arcadian shepherds and shepherdesses danced. It was as if a poem had taken life and become tangible, almost within his grasp.

But this was no lilting dance music. There was no melody, only a succession of notes rising and dying away like so many separate lives, each independent of the others. There was the suggestion of one voice calling to another, as owl calls to owl across the dark.

All in a moment Hurlow forgot the beauty of the sounds, and smelled fear. He smelled it as an animal smells it, the breath cold in his nostrils. He had read about Pan, a dead god who might safely be patronized while poring over a book in a London lodging, but here and at this hour a god not to be scorned.

The half conscious thought was a flash which died on the instant. Pan was dead. Voices had cried his death across the Ægean Sea. This was the twentieth century, and here was he, Hurlow, afraid because somebody chose to pipe at midnight upon a common.

His fear, he had to admit to himself, was incontestable; but then he was a nervous and high-strung man. In the ordinary way he would not have investigated the cause of the music, but the piper was somewhere in the hollow through which he had to pass, and to turn back would have been a concession to the weaker side of himself. Nine men in ten would not have been nervous; Hurlow was, but he strode on all the same. There was good stuff in this high-strung, imaginative bookworm!

He had not taken half a dozen further steps before the piping ceased suddenly, with no warning of finality in the last note. Nor, as he went on, did he know if he were glad or sorry that it was not resumed. Music or no music, he might yet meet the piper.

A minute or two later, when he reached the lip of the hollow, he saw below him, in the middle distance, a flickering red light. He pressed on down the path, and presently made out, in the dimness, the outline of a caravan. He drew a deep breath of relief. It was only a gypsy encampment, after all, and a gypsy piper playing to the stars.

He was not afraid of gypsies. They had a place of their own in romantic literature. He had read the works of George Borrow. He went forward more boldly.

At the bottom of the hollow the drought dried furze bushes grew sparsely, and there was ample room for a camp. Starlight and the glow of the camp fire lit up the scene for him. Two caravans and two tents were there, to leeward of the drifting wreaths of smoke, but none of the campers were astir or in sight.

His nervousness having left him, Hurlow had been prepared to exchange a "good night" with any gypsy he might see. Now, seeing nobody, his fear came upon him again. A furze bush scratched his legs as he hurried forward, lengthening his stride. If he could see nobody, he felt that others could see him—that he was watched by eyes which were neither uninquisitive nor kind.

A feeling of repulsion suddenly beset him, and spurred him up the farther slope of the hollow, away from the camp. Not once did he look back.

Later, when he had reached the edge of the sandy road, and was within a furlong of the inn, he halted to light a pipe. Then he found that his hands trembled so that seven or eight matches flickered out in quick succession.

## II

NEXT morning, after breakfast, Hurlow, lighting his first pipe of the day, stepped out of the inn door into the sunlit road.

The sun was already strong, for he had slept later than usual. Down the road, at the door of one of the cottages that clustered around the inn at this spot where a peninsula of cultivated land ran into the wild, Granny Light was being carried to

her chair by her granddaughter and her great-granddaughter. From the other direction came Walters, the head keeper, preceded by a mongrel, which made straight for Hurlow. The dog knew Hurlow for a friend and an occasional source of biscuits. Walters knew Hurlow for a London visitor who was generally willing to lay down the price of a pint of beer. Accordingly, he gave the city man a salute which he normally reserved for the local gentry.

The head keeper stopped to chat, first growling at his dog, which was pawing at Hurlow's coat.

"You're havin' all the fine weather, sir. If you can't say you brought it 'ere, you can say you've kept it 'ere. Down, Rob! Just off out for a walk, sir?"

"Yes, I expect so. Didn't know you had gypsies on the common."

"Oh, they're always somewhere about. It's a job to get rid of 'em, so long as you don't catch 'em doing nothin'. Have you seen some of 'em, sir?"

"Yes—there's a camp down in Furze Hollow."

The keeper's black, bushy eyebrows went up. Then he laughed.

"I reckon you got some of the names a bit mixed up, sir. Furze Hollow is the one place on this common where the gypsos won't go."

Hurlow pointed.

"Don't you call that Furze Hollow over there, with a footpath running through it to White's Copse?"

"Yes—that's Furze Hollow right enough, sir; but you ain't seen no gypsos there."

"Yes, I did. At least, I walked right through their camp."

The keeper's beady eyes twinkled and grew smaller. Wrinkles of laughter appeared at their corners.

"And what time was this, sir?" he asked.

"Close on midnight I should think."

"Ah, now! Come now, sir! You've been talking to Mr. Moffat, you 'ave!"

Hurlow was mystified.

"I was at his house last night," he said. "It was on my way home that I passed the camp."

Walters laughed. It was the smug, triumphant laughter of a man who catches another in the act of hoaxing him.

"Yes, and a nice camp and all you passed, sir!"

"What do you mean?"

"You try them jokes on somebody else, sir," said Walters, still laughing. "I crossed Furze Hollow at eleven o'clock, and there weren't no camp there then. No, sir—you'll have to try me with summat else. Come 'ere, Rob, drat you! Good mornin', sir—good mornin'. See you this evenin', p'raps, sir? And don't you let Mr. Moffat put you up to no more jokes, sir!"

He swung on, still laughing, leaving Hurlow mystified. The Londoner stood, staring after the retreating figure with a puzzled smile. Then he walked leisurely in its wake toward the cottages.

A queer business, this, if what Walters said was true! Had the man really crossed Furze Hollow at eleven o'clock on the preceding night? Strange that the camp should have been pitched and fallen to silence, and the fire grown so mellow, in that short time!

And what did the fellow mean about Hurlow's talking to Moffat, and perpetrating a joke? He had never felt less like joking in his life. He had certainly seen the encampment. Besides, there was the piper.

Desultory steps brought him opposite to Granny Light, who sat propped up at her door, mumbling and mouthing as usual, with a patchwork quilt wrapped around her; only this morning there seemed more light and life in her sunken eyes than usual. He addressed her in the tone that one generally uses to beings who can neither answer nor understand:

"Good morning, Mrs. Light. How are you this morning?"

Her fifty-year-old granddaughter answered for her from the open doorway.

"Granny's a bit better, thank you kindly, sir. She's been talkin' plainer, and she actually wanted to get up last night. I b'lieve she was strong enough to 'ave walked if we'd 'a' let her. Wonderful, 'twas! Maybe, though, 'tis only the last flicker of the candle."

Hurlow listened, his gaze on the old woman's face. Her eyes met his, and it seemed to him that she was addressing him. He bent his head to listen, and, for the first time, heard coherent words from her lips.

"I heered 'ee, boy—I heered 'ee! 'Tis the time come at last, and I be ready!"

"What is she sayin', sir?" the granddaughter demanded.

Hurlow did not repeat what he had heard. A shaft of cold had struck him



through the sun's heat. He wished them good morning, and set out to walk sharply to Moffat's cottage. For reasons which he did not care to analyze, he did not cross Furze Hollow, but took the longer way by road.

Moffat was neither washed nor fully dressed when he arrived. The recluse performed his toilet by installments, so that it was rarely complete before the late afternoon. He welcomed Hurlow without enthusiasm, but the story which his visitor unfolded awoke both his interest and his activity. He began feverishly to complete his toilet.

"It appears," Hurlow concluded, "that there's some story I don't know. Walters was sure that I had had it from you, and was using it to poke fun at him."

Moffat paused in the act of fastening his collar. His eyes, under bushy gray brows, were alight with excitement, but a suspicious gleam stole into them.

"My friend," he said, "can it be that you got the story from Walters, and are using it to poke fun at me?"

"Of course not! I know no story. Besides, am I that sort of man? For Heaven's sake, tell me what all this mystery is about!"

"I will tell you in good time, friend Hurlow; but first let us visit Furze Hollow. If there was an encampment there last night, either it will still be there, or there will be traces of it. Come!"

They set off together through the copses, Hurlow trying all the way to induce Moffat to talk, and Moffat steadfastly refraining.

On the lip of the hollow, Hurlow halted.

"They've gone!" he exclaimed.

Gone indeed were the caravans and tents that he had seen on the preceding night. The cuplike hollow beneath him was deserted, save for a single figure in white flannels.

"Yes, they've gone," agreed Moffat, gnawing at his beard. "And there's Lutford. Walters has lost no time in telling him."

"Who's Lutford?"

"He's the lord of the manor."

"Do you know him, then?"

"I don't know anybody. I believe we nod to each other. Ah, he's seen us!"

Lutford had indeed seen them, and was making for them up the slope as fast as a pair of long legs could carry him at a walking pace. The decreasing distance revealed

him as a young man with an aquiline nose, a narrow forehead, and features alike haughty and rather stupid. He nodded to Moffat when he had reached the pair, and addressed himself to Hurlow.

"Mr. Hurlow, I believe?"

"That's my name."

"Then will you have the goodness to tell me what you meant by informing my head keeper that you saw gypsies here last night?"

"I told him that I saw a camp, and so I did."

"Well, then, where is it? There has been no camp here. See for yourself! In future I should be obliged if you would refrain from fabricating stories likely to disturb my tenantry."

He brushed past them without another word, going the way they had come, and leaving Hurlow too angry and amazed to speak.

Moffat laughed softly in his beard.

"There goes a superstitious man," he said.

"Superstitious?"

"Not to believe, and still to fear; to half believe, and scorn wholly to believe—that is to be superstitious. Now let us see if we can find any vestiges of your camp. From what Lutford said, I do not think we shall."

### III

THEY searched the bottom of the hollow. There were no wheel marks, no trodden grass, no traces of horses, no mark of tent poles—nothing. A chill wind seemed to breathe on Hurlow. His face had turned pale beneath its varnishing of sunburn.

"The camp fire," said Moffat. "You say it was burning on the ground?"

"Yes."

But they searched in vain for a burned patch in the open spaces among the parched, crackling furze. It might have been virgin ground, untouched by man since the beginning of time.

"My God!" cried Hurlow suddenly and hoarsely. "There's something queer about this—something wrong. I don't like it! What does it mean?"

"Sit down," said Moffat, and lowered himself into a bed of dry bracken. "Sit down and don't be afraid, and I'll tell you all I know. It is foolish—superstitious, if you like—to be afraid, for nothing can happen against nature. Hitherto I have kept



an open mind about this matter, neither believing nor disbelieving, but admitting frankly to myself that I did not know. Now I am beginning to believe. Calm yourself, Hurlow, and remember that this old world of ours is continually making fresh discoveries and forgetting old ones. We shall never know what the denizens of the lost continent of Atlantis knew. We may never rediscover the lost arts of the Persian Magi, among whom it is almost certain astrology—to name but one—was an exact science. Our sciences would have astonished them; theirs would have equally astonished us. Only stray and broken remains of the secret arts of the ancients survive. The witchcraft practiced in the Middle Ages, and even to-day in certain places, was all a blindfold stumbling after a cult at some time perfectly understood."

He paused. Hurlow, sinking down beside him, said breathlessly:

"I don't understand you at all. What are you driving at? Where are you trying to lead me?"

"I am going to tell you an old story," said Moffat. "It is a well authenticated story, of which your experience may well be the sequel. A hundred years ago, or close upon it, there was an encampment of gypsies in this hollow. Their depredations aroused the ire of the local peasantry, who accused them of witchcraft, as well as of stealing. The squire—a Lutford in those days—at last ordered them to move, and in revenge they are said to have compassed by witchcraft the burning of the manor house. Certain it is that the house was gutted in about two hours one night. The house that you see standing to-day was built upon the ruins of the old one."

"The burning of the manor house brought matters to a head. The villagers, led by the squire, attacked the gypsies and burned out their camp in this hollow. There is supposed to have been bloodshed. One dying gypsy is said to have announced that they would return, and this return was naturally to be regarded as the portent of something ominous happening to the Lutfords. The present-day gypsies know the story, for Furze Hollow bears an evil reputation with them, and none of them would think of camping here."

"There is another chapter of the story. The gypsies, fleeing, left behind them a baby, which was picked up and adopted by a cottage woman who had just lost her own;

and that child is Granny Light, who is still living to-day."

Hurlow drew a sudden long breath.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "What are you telling me?"

"Now this is very interesting and curious. Old Granny Light, in her day, was supposed to possess strange and unholy knowledge. She is said to have practiced witchcraft, and the people about here, if you can get them to talk, will tell you of any number of miracles that she is supposed to have accomplished. Also she uttered a prophecy, years ago, to the effect that she would never die until her people came back for her—and you will remember that the dying gypsy had threatened their return. And here she is, still alive, perhaps a little more than a hundred years old, perhaps a little less."

"Well, there you have the story as accurately as I am able to recall it. Now you know why Walters thought that you were joking, and that I had already told you all this; and you know why Lutford, whom the legend threatens with a calamity, was disturbed."

Hurlow stared at him out of eyes which had grown watery with awe.

"Granny Light! The piper seemed to be calling some one. She was restless last night, Moffat—wanted to get up; and this morning she said quite clearly: 'I heered 'ee, boy—I heered 'ee! 'Tis the time come at last, and I be ready!'"

Moffat's long, thin hands were pulling a frond of bracken to shreds.

"Did she say that?" he asked jerkily. "And she wanted to get up, eh? Let's be calm about this, Hurlow—let's be calm, and try to understand. To us may be given an experience unique among living men. Let us try to be worthy of it. Granny Light is a gypsy, and these gypsies are an ancient people who come from the East. They have little to do with the present, and it may be reasonable to assume that shreds of the old learning remain with them. The gift of prophecy, and some of the arts which we ignorantly call witchcraft, may yet abide with them. You and I must be here to-night, Hurlow. There may be much to see!"

Hurlow bunched his handkerchief to wipe the sweat from his brow. When he spoke, his voice was like that of a man in pain.

"You have been talking—words, words, words—I have hardly heard them. For

God's sake tell me, Moffat, what do you really think?"

"What I really think?" Moffat repeated. "Well, then," he added calmly, "I think that Granny Light's people have come back. I think the piper called her, and I think that somehow she will join them. After that, only God knows what is to happen. You will not be afraid to come here again to-night?"

Hurlow left the question unanswered.

"I will come if you do," he said.

Moffat rolled over in the bracken, gazing out over the common, from which a flickering heat vapor ascended.

"It seems so strange to you, and so impossible," he said. "This is daylight, and the year is 1923. In a post office two miles away they are using the telephone and the telegraph. There is a race meeting only ten miles away. Some people would say that the things which we find ourselves believing could not happen in such times as these. We can only admit the incongruity."

He passed a hand over eyes half blinded by the sun, and said in another tone, and with seeming inconsequence:

"There will be another bad fire on this common unless we get some more rain soon, Hurlow!"

#### IV

HURLLOW supped with Moffat that night. They sat talking over the empty grate until nearly half past eleven, when they set forth together.

It was just such a night as the previous one. The moon had risen and set, but the velvet cloak of the firmament was spangled with stars.

All day Hurlow had been in a state of feverish excitement, but his mental ferment had slowly subsided as the time of the adventure drew nearer. This was partly due to the fact that the strangest experiences in life are apt to lose their effect if dwelt upon long enough, and partly due to Moffat's demeanor, which remained soberly constant. Things might interest the bearded, satyrlike little man, but they did not disquiet him. He lent confidence to Hurlow, who would have embarked with him on this adventure sooner than with any young giant armed to the teeth.

Neither spoke much as they breasted the heavy darkness of the copses, but Moffat's step was resolute and even sprightly. He

was the insatiable student going forth to learn.

He was already astride the stile separating the second copse from the open common, when he suddenly ceased moving and squatted upright on the top bar in a listening attitude. Hurlow, a pace or two behind him, saw him framed by an arch of the branches, a faunlike silhouette with uplifted finger.

"The pipes!" said Moffat, just above his breath.

Hurlow heard the notes, thrilling and soft in turn, and calling, calling, always calling. The magic of their sweetness scarcely touched him to-night, but he marked its effect upon Moffat, who lingered astride the stile for a long minute.

At last Moffat scrambled over, and Hurlow followed and trod on his heels, desperately anxious to keep pace over the narrow path between the furze bushes. As they hastened, again the piping died away, as suddenly as if the sound were cut off by the closing of a door.

On the edge of the hollow Moffat, who had kept the lead, suddenly stopped.

"There!" he said.

Hurlow looked over his shoulder, and below them, in the cup of the hollow, he saw the ruddy light of a camp fire. After a long moment, since he already knew what to look for, he saw more than that. Starlight and the light of the fire conspired to show him dim shapes, which he recognized as tents and caravans; but down there in that shadow land of furze and bracken there was no movement, no sign of life.

"What shall we do?" he whispered in Moffat's ear.

"You walked through it safely last night," Moffat replied, without moving.

"Yes, but I couldn't to-night. Last night I didn't know."

Moffat turned and faced his companion. Outwardly the old scholar was calm; his only sign of fear was that he sweated like a frightened horse. Hurlow saw moisture like dew upon his forehead.

"Nor could I," said Moffat simply. "I could reason soundly on the folly of fear, but I would not walk through that hollow for all the gold in the Indies!"

Something like panic struck at Hurlow. Moffat's confession of fear withdrew the prop upon which he had leaned. Down there among the motionless shadows lurked invisible things—things that were nameless,

shapeless, and malignant, things which could see without being seen. One of the long-lost terrors of childhood returned to him, and like a child he put his hand into Moffat's.

"What are we to do?" he asked in a whisper, hoping that Moffat would suggest a speedy retreat.

"What can we do? It seems that we are only men, and not heroes. We can only stay here and watch."

A moment later Hurlow cried out as if a flame had scorched him. There was a sudden crackling of bracken, and a man's form appeared out of the darkness at his elbow.

"All right, sir! All right!"

It was Walters, the head keeper. His face was ghastly, and by no muscular effort could he control the chattering of his teeth.

"My dog—he run away!" he whispered hoarsely. "He knows! Mr. Moffat, sir, for God's sake what does it mean?"

"I don't know." Moffat's voice was shaken, but it sounded almost nonchalant to the other two. "There seems to be a camp down there."

"Yes, there was one last night, and none this morning. There was none here to-night, half an hour ago. I've been watching all day, and all this evening, and no gypsies on the move, and now—there's fire and caravans and tents! I crawled as near as I dare, but that dog of mine he howled and ran, and dogs know! I've had a scrap or two with poachers, and I've been through the war, but I'd sooner put my head in hell than go down in that hollow!"

Neither Moffat nor Hurlow answered him. All three stood still, listening to the manifold little sounds that broke upon the silence of the night—the wind sighing in the feathery tops of bracken, the distant barking of a fox, the still more distant crowing of an early cock.

"Gentlemen," stammered the keeper, "you'll stand by me?"

"What can we do?" Hurlow growled.

"I got to warn the gov'nor that they're there; and I daren't move no more by myself. Don't stay 'ere, gentlemen! It ain't worth it. Nothin' ain't worth it!"

Moffat glanced at Hurlow.

"Let's go with him," he whispered. "We can return."

Walters knew his way about the common without paths. He knew all the open strips between the furze bushes, and the gaps be-

tween clump and clump; so he led them around the edge of the hollow, and out to the road.

His way lay past the inn. Despite the lateness of the hour, the door of it was ajar, and the aperture was faintly illumined by yellow candlelight. A woman, clasping a bottle, stepped back, calling out "good night" to somebody within. It was Mrs. Hicket, the granddaughter of Granny Light. Hurlow stopped and asked:

"What's the matter?"

"It's granny, sir," the woman explained. "We've been having trouble with her again. She've been sayin' as she must get up—her as haven't walked for ten years. I've been holdin' her, and terrible strong she've seemed. She's quiet again now, and sleepin', but I thought it best to get some brandy, in case she went faint after it all."

She hurried on, calling out "good night," and the three men exchanged meaning glances.

"We need not trouble to return to the hollow to-night," said Moffat. "Nothing will happen now!"

V

NEXT morning the glass fell, and in the afternoon there was a marshaling of clouds in the south and west—whither the wind had veered—which slowly spread itself across the sky. The rumble of far-off thunder, like distant guns, was heard; but the storm circled about without breaking overhead, and no rain fell.

Moffat came over to sup at the inn. Afterward he spent much time at the window of Hurlow's private sitting room, staring out into the night. Hurlow, smoking in an armchair, watched him, and presently inquired after the weather.

"I've seen lightning twice. If it would only rain!"

"Why?"

"I wish there would be a cloud-burst. I should like to see this parched land soaked and sluiced and flooded. I should like to see every ditch brimming and every pond overflowing."

"Because the land needs it?"

"Because young Lutford needs it. My friend, we can have no doubt that unless other powers intervene, there is a tragedy impending for that young man. We have seen and heard enough to assure us that old Mrs. Light's people have come back. They have made good half their threat by re-



turning from the grave, or from hell, or from where you will. The other unuttered half they have yet to make good. We are not, thank God, encompassed by only evil powers, although it would seem that to evil is given a long tether. The last tragedy was by fire. Water is the enemy of fire, and if the rain falls in time this tragedy may yet be averted; but it will be a close race. We must be out earlier to-night."

"Where?" Hurlow asked, puffing nervously at his pipe. "I don't—I don't think—I'll go to the hollow to-night."

"Nonsense!" Moffat said gently. "You have seen so much, and you must see the end. A storm is coming, and the storm will bring the rain. I think the end will be to-night."

Moffat had his way, and the two set out just before eleven o'clock. At the junction of the footpath and the road, they heard the distant sound of pipes.

"Ah!" whispered Moffat. "As I told you! Early to-night!"

To-night the pipes played clearly and sweetly and triumphantly on and on. Some notes broke and chuckled, as if with a lewd glee. The pipes called insistently, and yet played to a measure which tempted hands and feet to respond to its rhythm. Hurlow, scarcely knowing it, found himself marching springily to the beat of the tune.

Then Moffat's hand was on his arm, and Moffat's voice was in his ear:

"For God's sake, not this devil's dance!"

Louder, louder blew the pipes as they advanced toward the hollow. The sight of two figures ahead of them, standing on the edge of the dip, brought them to a sudden halt. Then Moffat, touching Hurlow's elbow, said:

"It's all right—they are Lutford and Walters. I know Lutford's way of leaning on his stick."

The young squire and the keeper heard them approach, and came a little way to meet them. Lutford held out a trembling hand.

"Mr. Hurlow," he said, "I beg your pardon for what I said to you yesterday. The unbelievable is true. It is good of you both to come to-night."

Hurlow muttered something as the four pressed forward once more. Minute by minute the piping grew louder, more alluring, more maddening.

"Has it been like this before?" Lutford asked between his teeth.

"No," muttered Hurlow. "Only a few notes—nothing like to-night."

On the edge of the hollow they could see the camp fire below, but the darkness around it was impenetrable. For a long minute they stood silent, listening to the strange music and the labored sounds of their own breathing. Lutford at last heaved a long sigh.

"I can't stand any more of this!" he whispered. "I'm going down!"

Instantly Moffat had him by the arm, and they made a curious picture for a moment—the little, frail, bearded man clinging to the tall, wiry youth.

"No, you're not!" cried the old scholar. "Not while there are three of us to hold you! Walters! Hurlow!"

They all seized him, and, after a moment, Lutford tacitly surrendered.

"If I were you, Mr. Lutford," said Moffat sternly, "I should be standing by my house to-night!"

"What—at home? With all this happening here?"

"You may be wanted there. Ah!" He uttered a sudden suppressed cry. "Did you see?"

A jagged vein of red lightning shot down from the sky, lighting the hollow for an immeasurable fraction of time.

"I saw caravans and tents," Lutford muttered.

"Nothing else? Listen! The piper is on the move. He is marching to and fro. You can hear. Wait for more lightning, and watch!"

As if in response to a silent request from all of them, there came another flash, revealing to all four pairs of eyes the cup of the hollow.

So much and so little may be seen by a flash of lightning. The eye sees, but, ere the brain can tell it what to look for, the chance is gone. Nevertheless, what Hurlow saw will remain impressed upon his memory until the day of his death. He saw human figures at the bottom of the hollow—perhaps a score of them—and all seemed to be swaying and gyrating to the measure of the pipes.

While he still stared into the dark, Moffat clutched his arm.

"Look!" he whispered. "That other light!"

There was another light now beside that of the camp fire. It grew larger and larger as they stared. A tongue of flame shot up



and vanished against the sky. Borne on the wind came the odor of a sweet and pungent smoke.

"The furze!" cried Lutford suddenly. "The furze is alight!"

The fire ran from bush to bush as if it followed a trail of oil. The light from a dozen blazes, which quickly merged into one crackling pool of fire, showed the smoke moving above it like a black cloak. Caravans and tents and people were gone. Only, in the midst of this sudden and growing waste of fire, the pipes played on sweetly, recklessly.

Great gusts of smoke blew into the faces of the four men, but they stood there watching, fascinated, unable to move, until at last Walters uttered a choking cry and pointed.

The fire had lit up all sides of the hollow, and had thrown a wall of bright haze against the darkness around its edges. As they stared, following the direction of the keeper's pointing finger with their gaze, they saw the bent figure of an old woman stumble into the radius of the light, not fifty yards away.

Hurlow uttered a little gasp and shut his eyes. He did not see what the others saw. They told him afterward how the woman's figure, moving swiftly and resolutely, climbed down the slope and flung itself into the bath of fire, which straightway engulfed it; and on the instant the piping ceased.

A blind terror came upon Walters, who uttered a sudden sobbing cry.

"Granny Light!" he shouted, his voice rising to a scream. "Granny Light! Oh, God, it was Granny Light!"

He spun about on his heels and began to run stumbly. His panic communicated itself to the others, so that they blundered after him. It was not until they had reached the road that Lutford regained control over himself.

"We must wake the village," he cried. "We must save the common if we can. Come on!"

Again they began to run. They were close by the inn when a frightened woman flung herself out of a cottage gateway across their path. It was Mrs. Hicket.

"Granny's dead!" she wailed. "Granny's dead! Oh, what shall I do? Granny's dead! She wanted to get up again, and I was holding her when she died. She was shouting about the piper when the breath left her!"

A cry from the inn distracted them from the woman's half hysterical clamor. An upper window had been thrown open, and the landlord was leaning out and shouting at the top of his voice.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!" he cried—the same word over and again.

Lutford took a few hasty steps toward the window.

"Yes," he shouted, "we know! Come down, will you? The common!"

"No, not the common! Oh, look, sir!"

Away to the north they all saw another glare in the sky, and a sudden leap of flames showed them the face of a tall, long, white-fronted house.

As the old manor house had been burned out that night nearly a hundred years before, so was the new one burned to-night—by what agency, who shall say?

### MAN'S FIRST TEMPLES

THE arching branches meet to build  
An aisle with pillars high  
And flowing window tracery, filled  
With stained glass of the sky.

Here mass is said a million times  
Beneath the fir's tall spire,  
While thrushes sound the Sanctus chimes,  
And warblers are the choir.

The censers are the balsam cones,  
Whose perfume mounts like mist;  
And in the pine tree's solemn tones  
The wind is organist.

*Charles Buxton Going*

# The Tarnished Woman

A STORY OF MODERN LIFE IN THE INTERNATIONAL PLAY-  
GROUND OF THE RIVIERA

By Vance Thompson

Author of "The Man of the Miracle," "Eat and Grow Thin," etc.

## XXI

LAMIA was still lying on the *chaise longue*. Since sending Grazia for her opals she had hardly moved.

At first she wondered what kept the girl so long. Then she may have dreamed a little, for she hardly noticed the passing hour. Her thoughts ran idly. They were no more in her command than were her dreams. They came and went as they would—fugitive thoughts that ran forward into the future or turned backward to the passions and terrors of the past.

"If I could forget!" she whispered.

In spite of her will, her thoughts went wandering to the haggard nights of Rome, to the passion that had masqueraded as love, and had pulled her down. No, she could not forget. Memories came back—evil memories. Like unclean things with viscous wings and feet, they prowled in her mind and passed away, only to come again; and she was too weak to defend herself against them.

Then, like far-off music slowly drawing nearer, she would hear a dream whisper promising her happiness. For a little while she would listen to it.

Love! She had seen it coming, and had laughed defiantly. What had love to do with her? She had tried to drive it away. Let it go to the callow girls who were as ignorant as she had once been! But it would not be driven away, standing close, proclaiming:

"I am here!"

As she lay there in her weakness, alone, she tried to picture in her mind the man she loved—Torpichen's face—the blue eyes meeting her own. Feebly she clung to the

picture, but always it seemed to be pushed aside.

And the memories came back—memories of a gown she had worn, of a scarf of trailing green and gold; memories insistent, mocking, obscene—that was Kurokin's face; memories of nights loud with laughter, and lit by degraded stars and a leprous moon.

They were memories black and menacing as mountains. They stood up between her and her love

"I cannot forget!" she whispered again. No—she could not forget.

Why? Why could she not forget?

Men forget. They are wise. Men alone are wise. They know that passion is not love; that it is something to play with and gamble with—like danger and death and fierce elemental things. When they have thrown the dice, they go away and forget the stake and the game.

The passion for killing big game in a jungle, matching life against the thrill of it—the lust for pulling down a woman—they are notable adventures; and for a man they are the same splendid adventure. In his glow of triumph he rides away.

"That's that!" he says lightly.

Then, forgetting the kill, he thinks of manly things—high endeavors, sacrifices, justice, cities to be built, hearth fires to be protected, altars to be erected to pure love. Men are wise. When, in some time and place, love comes to them, they forget their adventures in the jungle and stand up saying:

"Oh, woman, see what pure love has done to me! It has made me clean and new—fit mate for your newness!"

And, because it is true, the woman says:

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"Oh, man, how clean and new you are! Take me!"

Men are wise. They forget the loud laughter and the leprous woman. They wash the old kisses from their mouths, and no taste of poison is left. They are born anew, stainless and lovable, when love comes.

Lamia tried to push her thoughts away.

"It's a lie!" she told herself. "It's a lie, a lie! No one can forget. Men cannot forget!"

And yet she knew that men do forget, that the jungle passions leave no mark on them.

Why not women, too? Again and again she put the question, seeking an answer, pitying herself, and pitying women like herself.

Hunger has its rights; for man and woman its rights are equal. But sex hunger? Ah, no! The starved women die, starving, in the garrets and convents and caves of life, for there is one hunger no woman may satisfy and find safety. There are thousands upon thousands of virgins devastated by famine, imprisoned by laws and conventions stronger than steel bars, and starving in their cells.

And the wild women who break out and snatch at adventure—

They pay and pay.

Men only are wise. For themselves they have invented a kinder law. Nothing in their code proclaims them outcasts from society, blacklegs of their caste, because they have eaten when they were hungry. Not stones are thrown at them, but flowers. They hold their heads up. All is well. Why not? And when inevitable love comes down the highway of life, they run forward to meet it.

"Glory be to God!" the man says. "You are love!"

"Yes, praise be to God!" she replies. "I am love. I am the woman, pure and clean and new, born and preserved for you and for your eyes and your mouth and your compelling hands. Take me!"

And as before the man says:

"I, too, am pure and new and clean, for I have just been born afresh for you."

What he says is the truth, for he has forgotten the loud laughter and the leprous moons and the hungry hours. But can a woman forget?

Lamia was too weary to fight off the oppression of the night, heavy with storm.

She was too feeble to thrust back the black thoughts that came out of her past to haunt her—black, defiant thoughts, like night riders, and blacker memories, too, that made themselves far worse than they had been, as beggars ape deformity to make themselves appealing.

She tried to rebel against them. What had she to do with thoughts like these? She had never been one of those women who snatch at adventure. Never—she knew it well. No cry of sex hunger had sent her ravening out into the highroad. She had been going her way alone, full of high purpose, dreaming, and then—

Something had pulled her down. It was something that leaped upon her from the roadside, snarling, and rolled her body in the dust; but what had it to do with her? She was always herself. Cold and white, untouched, unseen, safe hidden within that body, she had waited for love to come and claim her. She had waited within, a virginal soul, hungry—

And love had come.

What else mattered? She would not think of anything else.

Lying there, slender and long, with folded hands and feet, covered here and there with cold-colored silk, she tried to drown herself in her love dream—in the vibration of the man she loved—in Andrew, Andrew—in the light of his eyes, which could see, deep within her, the white soul waiting for him and his compelling word.

This aspiration toward her lover soothed her like some beneficent drug. She seemed to herself to be floating toward him and the shelter of his love.

When the door opened softly, she did not turn her eyes toward him. She knew that he was coming—only he; and a shadowy smile crept round her mouth as she sensed his presence.

"I'm not sleeping," she said.

Torpichen came and stood by the couch where she lay, and bent over her with anxious eyes.

"But you have rested, dear?"

"Yes—I seem to have been resting for hours and hours. Is it very late?"

"No."

She looked up, first at his face, and then she saw the opals in his hands.

"Oh, the poor things! I asked for them—or did I? I remember," she said musingly, "but for a while I forgot. Perhaps I've been dreaming." She shuddered

slightly, and moistened her lips with her tongue. "I don't know."

"Will you take them, dear?"

"Put them around my throat. They are sick and lonely."

"That will comfort them," Torpichen replied.

Kneeling beside her, he slipped the opals about her neck and fastened them. She cuddled them against her breast and fondled them.

"You are still bold enough to wear them?" he asked, as he watched her making play with them. "Stones of the shadow! They summon ghosts *et umbram mortis*."

"What does that mean?"

"Nothing." He regretted what he had said. "Only that they are queer things, opals."

"I'm protected," she replied. "See!"

She showed him the bracelet on her wrist. It was the three-quarter circle of a little donkey shoe, worn thin. She wet the tips of her finger and touched the metal—for protection.

"You do it, too, Andrew! One never knows. I do not believe in silly superstitions, but touching metal keeps away evil things and bad luck, no matter what you say."

Torpichen touched the donkey shoe, and, holding her hand, did not release it.

"You've been to your hotel. Nurse told me. You put on another suit. I like this one. Brown suits you, doesn't it?"

There were many questions she wanted to ask him, but they seemed to hide at the back of her mind, as if afraid to come forward.

For a while they were silent. Outside the quiet room the night seemed filled with muttering discontent. The red Judas tree was tossing its bloodstained leaves.

"There is storm in the air," Torpichen said.

He was still kneeling by her side, her hand held fast in his.

"What does it matter?" she asked.

In fact, it did not matter. He had made the remark because he knew they were talking on the surface, and he wanted to go on in that way. He rose, drew a chair close to the couch, and, sitting down, again possessed himself of her hand.

Every time her eyes met his, they questioned him, and he knew she was only sparing for time. She was getting up her cour-

age. She had come out of the cloud of weak unconsciousness into which the shock of the bullet wound had thrown her, and was gradually piecing together the events of that tragic night. He could see her mind fumbling with them, picking them up, almost as if they were visible things; and he was alarmed.

So far as it was possible, they had kept everything from her. The medical men had insisted upon it, and she had not pressed questions upon them during the day, fearing—subconsciously, perhaps—to know the truth. And so she had not learned of Kurokin's sinister end—of the broken and mutilated body that had been hauled out of the ravine; of the search for the murderer, and of the suspicion hanging over Torpichen. She had not even learned of the theft of her jewels.

The drowsy sick room had been a cell of silence, from which all rumors had been shut out. Now at last she was fully awake, conscious of her problems—alive, with the man she loved sitting by her side in this haunted bedroom of the evil villa.

She glanced sidewise at Torpichen's bent head, the strong neck, the smooth hair—and then her hand fell softly.

"I am well enough now," she began slowly, "to go away—from here."

"Soon," he answered. "The Countess Louvorsky wants you to come to her. I promised to tell you."

"I don't mind. She is an old friend. I knew her well in Rome. That must have been long ago. So much has happened!"

Lamia had spoken in short, half careless sentences, but now she drew his head down to hers and looked him in the eyes.

"Andrew, what has happened?"

Her face was drawn. Her eyes were narrow and sad, as if they were looking back into a past for which even love could find no justification, perhaps no pardon. Torpichen read the unspoken thought. As well as if she had told him, he knew what painful memory had risen in her mind, and he answered it in his own way.

"Nothing matters but the present, Lamia—this hour, and you and I, and our love!"

She could not forget so easily.

"Poor Andrew!" she murmured gently.

"You love me! Say it! You know you love me!"

"What if I do?"

"Then nothing else matters."



It really seemed to him that there was nothing of real importance in the world but her love for him and his deep, sad love for her. Life, with its tumults and tragedies and indecencies, was only a confused background against which their love stood out high and clear. He wanted her to see it in that way, for he honestly believed that the past had no hold on him.

Always, with narrowing eyes, she studied his face, reading there his love—yes, but discerning other submerged emotions, masculine and atavistic. She told herself that nothing in his past would ever really trouble him. She repeated to herself:

"Yes, men are wise. They forget and are born anew for each new love."

But could she ever forget? That leprous moon would rise again and peer in on them where they lay. In the stillness of the night the dead laughter would waken. They would see and hear, and that would be hell.

She wanted more for him than love. She wanted honor, and a home in his soul. She wanted to live, not only with him, but with his vision and his dream, by day, by night, every moment. She wanted to be always there, before, behind, beside his vision and his dream. She wanted possession as well as love, and she felt herself utterly weak and broken by the past.

He, too, whether he knew it or not, wanted more than love.

"I couldn't make you happy, Andrew."

"Happiness? My God, what does that matter? We've got something better—love. Anyway, the only happiness I want is just what you can give me. That is where I am selfish, dearest. I want your kind of happiness, or unhappiness—whatever you call it—the Lamia kind. We'll share it!"

He stooped and kissed her, and his lips had ways of convincing her that were far more potent than words. She did not cling to him; she hardly moved; only she let herself lie there imprisoned in the enfolding vibrations, masculine, compelling, that streamed from him.

"You'll think I'm weak," she murmured.

"You are well and strong."

"I didn't mean that way," she said, in a little whisper that hardly reached him.

"You are to be quite well again," he repeated, "and strong, as when we tramped the hills together; and we'll be tramps again!"

He held her body close, trying to capture her imagination, and to tear it away from the shadows and memories of that accursed villa. He pictured a world full of sunlight and distance and emptiness, in which they should wander, carrying their happiness with them.

"For I can make you happy, Lamia. Tell me!"

"Dear, you've given me the only happiness I've ever known," she replied, and for herself she added: "And the only real suffering."

"In a few days, in a week, you'll be on your feet—those swift young feet," Torpichen went on. "Then we'll begin our lifelong journey together—lifelong, and on across the frontier—together!"

He told her about it with gentle whispering kisses on face and hair.

"If it could be, Andrew! But I don't know. I am afraid!" She shuddered closer to him, and fear widened her eyes. "Andrew!" she cried suddenly, and did not hear his answer, for at that moment the storm broke.

Hour after hour it had waited, haunting the night. Now, in an instant, all the lawless forces of nature were loosed in the echoing hills. The sea was up; the dogs of the deep howled. Overhead, in a black sky, the metallic clouds smote upon one another. The lightning lunged, and thunderous sound streamed earthward like a torrent.

"Andrew!"

He gripped her and dragged her into his arms, enveloping her terror-stricken body in his strength and in his love.

"A storm, dear. It will pass."

"No, not the storm! It is the answer—"

"Lamia!"

"It is the answer to everything. God is proclaiming it to us. I can't have you, Andrew. Go away! It is the end."

"Steady, Lamia, dearest!"

His voice caught and held her for an instant. Freeing herself a little, she turned and stared with fixed, hallucinate eyes at the window that opened on the balcony. The great silk curtains were swaying and bellying to the storm.

"God!" she exclaimed under her breath; and then she shrieked aloud: "Andrew!"

She tore herself from his arms, staggering to her feet, thrusting out her weak, naked arms toward the window.

The curtains parted. Against the dark

a figure showed, uncertain, motionless. There was a death face, and eyes in it like old fire—a figure out of hell.

Torpichen's leap at it was quicker than his thought. His human hands were on it, gripping the throat. For a second they heaved and grappled there, and in the struggle a revolver fell harmlessly to the floor. The thing he fought with was silent, save for the gasp of breath, but Torpichen swore softly to himself, and hate ran through him—hate fierce and exultant, glorious. It burned in his muscles.

His hate was meeting a hate as fierce as his own. It clung to him, and, although it could not conquer, it would not let him go. Locked together, they reeled out on the balcony into the thunder of the storm.

Joyously, swearing oaths he had never known, Torpichen hurled the thing against the railing of the balcony, which gave way under the drive of his strength. The thing was screaming savagely, and it clung to Torpichen as a wild cat might cling to a wolf. Together, they crashed down into the garden below.

Even as they fell, a flame of lightning lunged, like a sword, for the red Judas tree, and struck and splintered it into a thousand fragments, burying them beneath its ruins. It was as if the spirit of the evil tree had been freed at last, had taken its vengeance, and had gone elsewhere, seeking other betrayals. What was left was the splintered trunk in which it had dwelt, a little heap of twisted branches, a welter of leaves the color of Judas's hair, and half buried forms—motionless.

Abruptly the storm had ceased, as the wind died along the sea, though the black night still rocked to and fro.

The flare of an electric torch showed. Forbess held it, and with him came the *padre*, breathing hard.

"Do you see anything?"

"There—some one!"

It was Torpichen. Even as they touched him, he drew himself up on his elbow. He looked dazed.

"I'm all right," he said. "A bit dizzy—I fell. I'm all right now."

They set him on his feet. His strength came back to him, and his anger.

"Where's—"

"Hush!" whispered the *padre*.

He pushed aside a branch of the shattered tree, and there, in a torrent of blood-red leaves, it lay. It was crumpled and

horrible, but it was unbroken. It was something that had once been a man and that still lived feebly. The sword of the lightning, lunging true, had touched the life center, but death came lingeringly.

A groan burst from the dying lips. The priest bent down.

"Bring the torch here," he said. "The man's not dead."

"It's that damned vagabond," Forbess whispered.

Torpichen did not speak. He was staring down at the face—the snarling mouth, the evil eyes. He was looking at the hands, the terrible hands of one about to die. In them it seemed, at these last moments, that all the soul of the man had taken refuge, so that the implacable law of giving up life should be rigorously verified. They were clenched, like the hands of shipwrecked men, or those who fall into a gulf.

"No, not the vagabond," Torpichen exclaimed. "It is Prince Kurokin!"

It was Kurokin. It was the man whom the world thought murdered, and whose body was supposed to lie in the little cemetery by the sea, guarded by sentinel cypresses. It was Kurokin—and on his deformed finger the great diamond blazed in the torchlight.

"Do not try to move him. Stand away!"

The *padre* motioned them back, and knelt down and took the tossing hands in his. For the wisdom of the church had taught him that the last resort of those who wish to speak to a dying man is to seize his hands. Then the dying eyes open, and the soul pauses for a moment and listens.

"Kurokin!" the old priest said.

The lips moved.

## XXII

THE Princess Castelmare was receiving her friends in the drawing-room which gave on the formal Italian gardens of her *palazzo*, and Miss Demdyke, in a very becoming new frock, was pouring the tea.

It may be said that Miss Demdyke, her demure dignity heavy upon her, looked prettier, perhaps, than ever before. She was dainty enough to stand on a mantelpiece next to the Sèvres vase, and she won approving looks.

"I was just the same at her age," the princess was saying to Lady Milding.

Evidently time had created a difference.

Sir Humphrey was stirring his tea and

talking to Forbess. The old priest was wearing a new cassock, and nursed on his knees a new hat. His old hat had vanished in his fierce race to the Villa Corinte, that night of the storm, and his old cassock had been torn to ribbons. He laid down his teacup on a table at his elbow, and smiled at the Princess Castelmare.

"I am only too glad to tell you all I know," he said. "I think I know almost everything that has come out, and what has come out—thanks to Mr. Ricci—is the truth."

"And there was the confession, was there not?" interposed the princess.

"Confession? No. There was a statement—a strange, bitter, and, I must admit, particularly venomous statement. I am glad he lived long enough to make it. Otherwise we should still have been in the dark. It was this way," the *padre* went on, and made a little gesture that enforced silence.

He spoke very slowly and clearly, as if he were reading the words from a printed page. He was, indeed, reading them from the page of his infallible memory.

His account of the grim events of the Villa Corinte began in far-off Russia, in the old home of the Kurokins. There were General Kurokin, his wife, and their little boy, Paul; and another boy, the illegitimate child of the general by a peasant woman on the estate. In the frank Russian way, the boy had been brought up indulgently, and without attempted concealment of his paternity. He knew, others knew.

The peasant mother taught her boy one thing—hatred. He grew to manhood filled with hate for the father who had wronged him, and for the half-brother who had taken his place. That was the way Dimitri, the Kurokin born out of wedlock, saw it. He was a victim, and vengeance was his due.

All this he hid away, showing it only to the peasant mother. The Kurokins fancied, in their blind, careless way, that he was full of love and gratitude. They trusted him, taking him into their home, making him a sort of steward and friend. The son of the house held him in affection—in a kind of brotherly love.

It was the revolution that gave the traitor his chance. He brought down on the house wherein he had been nurtured, loved, and trusted, the vengeance of the red wolves of revolt. In that horrible

scene of torture of which Lady Milding had first spoken, and which the Countess Louvorsky had related, the Kurokins had perished tragically. Their son, Paul Kurokin, had perished, Dimitri believed, with them; but Dimitri, with what of the Kurokin fortune he had been able to hide away, escaped and got out of Russia.

Once in safety, he was no longer the Bolshevik. He dropped all that, and hid himself in the personality of his half brother. He became Prince Paul Kurokin. At last the wheel of his vengeance had turned, and had given him the place and wealth he had always coveted. He was no longer a peasant woman's love child. He was prince and gentleman, a true Kurokin—of his own creation.

The Countess Louvorsky readily accepted him at his own valuation. Why not? She had not seen Paul since he was a child, and this man, bred in the house of the Kurokins, bore a strong resemblance to his half brother. Both of them, Paul and Dimitri, were stamped with the look of the father.

Not only the Countess Louvorsky accepted the masquerader, but all that exiled world of Russian refugees accepted him. For her and for them he was indeed Prince Paul Kurokin, son of the general and his martyred lady.

He was safe, he was rich, and, above all, he had had his vengeance on the house of Kurokin. He took life royally at Rome, and it was in his strange and evil destiny to pluck a star out of the sky. That was his base triumph over a young girl's weakness and ignorance. It was in his destiny, and it was also in his destiny that Paul Kurokin, the man he claimed to be, should not have perished in that massacre in far-off Russia.

After incredible hardships, which almost wrecked his reason, Prince Paul got out of Russia and reached Paris. There he was one of the unhappy hundreds who sought out the Russian ambassador. The ambassador listened to the refugee's story, but could he believe it, without some more definite evidence? He would make inquiries, he said, and advised patience. It was diplomatic; to Prince Paul, who had heard that some one had taken his name, and had forged his signature at the banks where the Kurokin money lay, it was maddening.

Almost penniless as he was, he set out for Italy, where he heard the impostor was living openly in his name. He made his



way south—a vagabond, daily more unkempt and ragged, but determined to run down the man who had usurped his place in the world. For who could it be? Who could successfully impersonate him save that evil son of the house of Kurokin, the traitor and assassin Dimitri?

Prince Paul had been long on the way, plodding along the weary roads of France; and meanwhile the ambassador had kept his word. He had made inquiries through the police of two countries—France and Italy—about this so-called prince who was living so conspicuous a life at San Remo; and Dimitri got word of it.

It was sinister news. The real prince, then, had come to life!

The pretender, remembering that night of torture and massacre when the general and his wife had been done to death, knew that nothing would stay the avenger's hand—nothing but death. He was sure that his half brother would search him out; and therefore Dimitri, driving to and fro in his yellow car, haunted the frontier, watched the approaches to San Remo, and lay in wait for his enemy, determined to kill the man in whose death alone lay his own safety.

He must do it himself. Whom could he trust but himself—his own red hand—to deliver him from the half brother whose place in the world he had taken?

Day and night he watched and waited; but Prince Paul Kurokin escaped him, crossed the frontier in Andrew Torpichen's car, and reached San Remo.

There he found refuge in the old town, and at last—for his destiny had him in hand—persuaded Beppo to hide him. It was the cellar of the chalet in the garden of the Jesuits that Beppo gave him for a hiding place—the half forgotten mule cellar, giving on the street.

Why the gardener's sympathy went out to him it would perhaps be difficult to explain. Beppo, too, was of the wild—a friend of hunted things. He took Prince Paul Kurokin into shelter, as once he had gathered up a starving red cur and made it part of his strange and wayward life.

One night, when he slipped in to bring food, holding up his light, he saw the wretched vagabond tossing there in his sleep—moaning, his face drawn with the torture of some frightful dream of massacre and blood. Stooping, in pity, he touched him lightly on the shoulder. The man

leaped to his feet, shrieking out a wild cry that rang through the night. Terrified, Beppo silenced him with soothing words, and then, as soon as he could, hurried away.

This was the cry that Forbess heard. This was the night when he saw Beppo coming from the cellar and limping away through the garden.

With the gardener's aid, Prince Paul found the villa where the impostor lived, and left the dire message—the blood-rusted needles of that Russian crime. Dimitri was not at home. Always he was hunting the man who, he knew, was hunting him. It was not until he learned from the Countess Louvorsky what things were happening at the villa in his absence, that he hastened back to San Remo. Her idle gossip had told him of Torpichen's visits, and fear of his enemy gave way for a moment to barbaric jealousy. He sped back to the villa, only to learn he had more than a rival to face.

When Guido gave him the packet with the fatal needles, he knew that his evil destiny had found him out. It was no longer a fight for a woman he had before him—it was a fight for life and liberty and fortune and all that made life sweet. It was not of his rival, Torpichen, that he was thinking, but of the avenger who had risen, as it were, from the ashes of the dead.

He dressed hastily that evening, eager to see the Countess Louvorsky, and to learn from her what was known of his half brother's reappearance. Had Prince Paul already visited her and told his story? Dimitri must know the truth.

Guido, who valeted him, had laid out two evening suits—one with a dinner coat—that he might make his choice. One suit was left there.

The Countess Louvorsky was not at home. He motored back to the villa, and sent his chauffeur, with the car, around to the garage at the far side of the house. He walked up the long drive toward the front door, and in the shadows came face to face with what might have been himself.

The leap of his heart told him who it was before their eyes met; but Prince Paul Kurokin, facing him there in the garden, was no dirt-clogged, half crazed outcast, as Guido had described the man who left the needles for him. Straight and clean as himself, dressed in evening clothes, as Dimitri himself was dressed, his half brother



came toward him—menacing, relentless, with death in his pale, avenging eyes.

"Aye," said the *padre* softly, "death was in the balance, and for a moment none could say whose death would tip the scale."

No word was spoken, or could be spoken, so quick Dimitri was. He fired, and Prince Paul Kurokin fell dead at his feet.

For a moment the murderer thought of calling aloud—of proclaiming that he had shot down a thief who had crept into his house, robbed him, stolen even his garments—the very evening clothes in which he lay dead. Then he reflected. He had heard sinister reports that Prince Paul had already enlisted the aid of the Russian ambassador in Paris. The police might even now be at work.

Quickly he decided. He began to drag the body toward the ravine. It was heavy—heavy as crime. As he was struggling with the dead thing, a little voice, like that of an animal, shrilled in his ear:

"It's too heavy for you, eh? It's like that—the dead cling to the earth when you try to drag them away!"

The assassin whirled around on the witness of his crime. It was Beppo, a dim little figure of a man—perhaps half animal, half man—there in the gloom of the garden. To Beppo life and death were as indifferent as the fall of a leaf.

Beppo swore, the *padre* averred, that when he spoke he did not know which man lay dead there—the vagabond whom he had guided to the villa or the Kurokin on whom vengeance was to be taken. Perhaps he did not care. At any rate, he took the feet of the corpse and the murderer took it up by the hands.

Then a thought came to Dimitri. He bade Beppo wait there by the dead man's body, in the shelter of the bushes. His plan was to go into his room and secure his own passport. In his pocket he had only his card of identification.

His nearest way led through the windows opening upon the salon. What he saw there was Lamia—Miss Borg—and Andrew Torpichen. His barbaric jealousy caught at him. He raised his revolver and fired. The bullet was meant for his rival, but she, throwing herself in front of Andrew, saved him from death. Then Torpichen hurled the bust, and, dazed, half conscious, the murderer reeled out into the garden. It was Beppo who picked him up and helped him away.

It was an evil moment for Dimitri when he got back to his senses. Had he killed Lamia? He thought so. He must escape, and at once.

Where could he hide so securely as in death itself? With part of the bust that Torpichen had thrown, he battered the dead man's features. Then, remembering his own crooked finger—so sure a mark—he hacked off, with Beppo's garden knife, the corresponding finger of the corpse. He thrust his identification card into a pocket of the coat—the dinner jacket—that he was wearing, and exchanged coats with the dead man.

Then, fate smiling on his crime, he discovered his Russian passport where he himself had put it the last time he had worn the dress coat. Both these documents were now thrust into the clothes of the corpse, and then he and Beppo tossed the poor mangled body over the wall down the ravine.

Once more he bade Beppo wait. Dared he enter the house again? He had no choice. While the servants and all within were gathered round Miss Borg, he slipped up to his room and found the ragged clothes discarded by the vagabond. He took them. Then, snatching up what money and valuable papers he could find in a moment, he stuffed them into his dressing bag and crept out of the house.

Beppo, indifferent to the quarrels and crimes of humanity, gave him refuge in the cellar of the chalet, where before he had hidden the vagabond. There he lay and nursed his wounded head, making plans for his ultimate escape.

Beppo brought him news that the body had been found, and that no one even suspected it was not that of the Prince Kurokin whom they had known. Moreover, with grimmer satisfaction, the murderer learned that Andrew Torpichen was suspected of having killed him.

Through Beppo he finally got into touch with Guido. That cynical, purchasable rogue did not need much persuading. When he knew that his late master was really alive, and that the threatening vagabond was dead, he was ready enough to join forces. They would escape together.

Guido knew many hiding places among the ruined cities of the hills, even as he knew the slums of Genoa. He foresaw for himself a life of pleasure and profit, as he wandered the world, blackmailing this

money-laden criminal; but he also took thought for himself. Beppo was to come and take his valise, which would be lowered from his window; only what the valise actually contained was not the flunky's clothes, but the loot of his mistress's jewel casket and of the villa.

"And there," said the *padre*, his old eyes twinkling, "Mr. Forbess took a hand."

"And you, too, *padre*."

"I don't mind being praised for the fact that I kept up with you, Forbess, in that race," the old priest said; "but Beppo escaped us, and we arrived too late to stop Kurokin. He was over the wall while we were struggling up the ravine."

"If Torpichen had not been there—"

"But he was there, or another murder would have been done. That unhappy man's lust for vengeance was greater than his fear of capture, but the hand of God finally pulled him down. God's lightning touched him, and he died—wildly, violently, as he had lived. I fear he was a very bad man," the priest added reflectively; "but we are not here to judge him. Death has stepped in to defend him."

"I don't see why the fellow wasn't unmasked long ago—the flunky posing as the master," Sir Humphrey put in coldly. "The Countess Louvorsky, at least, should have known that he was an impostor."

"It would seem so," agreed the *padre*; "but your valet always has a certain facility in imitating the gentleman—well enough, at any rate, to deceive a woman."

"Men, too, it appears," the princess remarked bluntly.

"Of course—men, too. You would think Torpichen might have suspected, when the fellow let himself be knocked down at Monte Carlo, and never sought satisfaction."

"What he sought was vengeance," Forbess interposed.

"The lackey in his master's coat! It is more than the story of that wretched man. You know that, Sir Humphrey." The *padre* turned toward the old diplomatist. "It is the story of all Russia. He was merely the symbol of millions of Dimitris. It is the old story of the domestic become master—the farce of low life above stairs. The servants have become masters, and the masters have become servants. That, as you know, is the secret of historic evolution in all the ages. *Imperium æquiparat servitutem*," he added. "Yes, there are

millions of lackeys in their lords' coats, and there is no reason why we should have identified this one. Then, too, he was really a Kurokin—baseborn, to be sure, but still at least half Kurokin. It was that part of his blood that fooled us."

No one picked up the *padre's* remark. They had heard him more than once on revolution and democracy and kindred high-sounding topics.

"And the thief?" Sir Humphrey asked. "The butler?"

"Guido? Ah!" replied the *padre*, with a certain air of satisfaction, as if he were speaking of something perfect of its kind. "There is a wily rogue for you! I fancy Mr. Ricci has him in hand. He makes a good defense, I hear. He insists that he was merely being faithful to his master. Even that business of robbing the villa, he insists, was done at his master's bidding. That was his whole trouble—the habitude of being faithful."

And that was really Guido's defense. It was true that he had admitted the vagabond into the villa, but only after being convinced that he was the real prince, and that the other was a scoundrel. His duty, wasn't it? So he let him into the bedroom, gave him a bath and razors, and let him help himself to clothes; and there he left him, going away himself for the comfort to be had in a wine shop.

Of course, later, after the murder, he discovered he had been mistaken, and that his duty bound him, after all, to his original master. Therefore he made ready to go away with him—why not?—and packed up the things of value in the house. They belonged to his master, didn't they? No? Well, that again was an innocent mistake.

He had accused Mr. Torpichen of the murder. Again, why not? Hadn't the American smuggled the vagabond into San Remo, as Beppo had told him? From beginning to end, declared Guido, he had been a victim to his sense of duty—that and nothing more.

"But Mr. Ricci also has a sense of duty," Sir Humphrey remarked. "Has he not, *padre*?"

"Yes, he has; and so Guido is down in the old prison by the Molo," returned the priest, with a grim smile.

"Anybody want some more tea?" Betty asked abruptly.

No one wanted any more tea. She deserted the tea table, and strolled toward

the window that was a way out to the garden.

"And that strange little Beppo of yours, *padre*—have they caught him?" Lady Milding inquired.

"One does not catch a hill man; but he has been seen," the priest answered. "Old Lucrezia, his aunt, knows where he is, I dare say. At all events, he is not invisible, since he no longer has that frightful relic of superstition, the severed finger of a murdered man. It was strange that he left it in his lair, but perhaps it was not ready for the incantation."

"They believe such things?" asked the princess.

"And a thousand others, up yonder in the stone cities of the hills."

"It seems to me that is another reason for locking the fellow up," declared Sir Humphrey.

"No, no!" urged Lady Milding gently. "Surely he is not altogether responsible?"

"He is not, Lady Milding," returned the priest; "and he should not be blamed too much. He is one of the hill people, a descendant of the old fire-worshiping Ligurians. Is he quite human? I hope so. I trust he has understanding enough to be saved withal, and you know we have to believe that his soul, when properly cleansed, will be acceptable to his Creator. He was prowling in the old hill cities like a wild animal when I found him—or, at least, when his aunt brought him to me. He has always borne watching, I am sorry to say—eh, Forbess?"

But Forbess was not in the room. Betty, too, was not in the room.

"They are in the garden," murmured Mrs. Demdyke placidly.

"Of course they are," the princess replied. "Thank Heaven, Betty has come to her senses!"

"I am sure it will be quite suitable," Lady Milding said sweetly, "from all points of view."

"They were made for each other," the princess proclaimed, in her best manner. "I always said so. Indeed, I knew it from the first day I saw that dear young man!"

The *padre* smiled and chuckled. He did not seem very much surprised.

### XXIII

WHY she clung to the Villa Corinte Lamia did not know. Torpichen had urged her to leave it, and the *padre* had advised

her to do so, but she would not go. The very horror that brooded over the place seemed to give her courage to do the thing she had determined to do. Her physical strength had come back to her, and, with it, a moral energy that had been quiescent, drugged by the facile emotions of her drifting way of life.

"I have found myself at last," she said confidently.

She tried to think that she was like the girl she had once been, proud and independent, and ready to face the consequences of her acts.

"Things did not happen to me. No—I pulled them down on my own head. I am to blame for it all."

In the long hours of day and night she saw this "all" for which she was to blame—men murdered and killed, men lying in prison for theft or hunted over the hills, and one man—God forgive her that sin—cursed with the doom of love for her.

In the chaos of her life Andrew Torpichen's love for her stood up dark and enormous in its tragedy; for she knew how well he loved her. There was no use lying to herself about that—he loved her. With all the power of her love-starved soul she had sought his love and gained it. Why should she lie to herself? He was her man, and she was his woman. An ineluctable decree, old as time, had set them apart from other souls, and nothing could change it. They had hunted each other down, each of them hunting across half the world; and they wanted each other with overwhelming desire.

She and he—and yet, with a resolution that held, though it wavered, she had been able, through the days and nights, to keep him away.

It was easier to hold to her resolve here in the crime-soaked villa. The muttering ghosts aided her. It was her fortress against him—against her lover, against herself, against her love, against her happiness. The very hideousness of the memories that clung to the walls and dripped from the tapestries gave her strength to do what she had determined to do.

There was no use in bidding him to go away. He was chained to her by a love as strong as her own. She must place herself beyond his reach.

"When we are married, Lamia," he had said, taking for granted, in his dominant way, the consent she had never given.



She had looked at him with eyes that were suddenly blind and could not see his face, and her heart shook, but she had not answered him. She had no answer ready; but now she knew what she must say to him—no, and no, and no!

At last she had found herself, and something she called duty bade her answer no. What she called duty was an immense passion for sacrifice. Only by sacrificing herself could she pay for what she had done. It seemed to her that she absolutely must pay in suffering—alone.

This feeling grew stronger and stronger within her. It was the instinctive desire, which lies deep within the woman soul, that justice shall be done. It was entirely just and right that she should suffer. Her very love for Andrew Torpichen—love at once fierce and pitiful—sustained her in her fixed determination.

She would not lay upon him the burden of her past.

She sat with closed eyes, thinking; and her past streamed by her with its leprous moonlight and little cries and laughter.

Could she forget? And, if she forgot, could he ever forget? Over and over again she asked herself these questions.

Oh, their love was pure, it was white and masterful as light! But what would happen to it in the years, when these old memories woke and leaped and yelped at them—these horrible memories?

For his soul's sake, she told herself, she could not consent. She saw herself going down through the self-sacrificial years, bent and lonely, but victoriously atoning—for his sake.

She was fighting this battle alone. She had shut her door against her lover. Alone in the house of evil memories she fought her battle.

She was afraid to see him. She feared him and his weapons. They had the strength of carnal things. He would come to her in the arrogance of health and courage and passion, with love shining in his eyes, with his conquering hands held out to her, and he would take her. He meant to have her, in spite of everything, in spite of herself.

And her weapon against him? What had she but her poor, tortured, loving woman's soul, so weak in its yearning, so strong in its purpose? She had that, and her love for him, for she loved him better than she loved herself. Her first and last thought

had always been for him—the only man who had ever possessed her heart and filled her life.

But what could she give him? Wifehood? She who had committed the sin unpardonable—for a woman?

Her hatred for the dead man rose up anew. She remembered the night of poisonous moonlight, the passion-drugged wine, his laughter as he pulled her down and set his mark upon her. What followed was sheer recklessness and bravado—the devil rising in her and proclaiming defiance to the world.

For Kurokin there was only hate—hate growing colder and deadlier. She hated him for the passion he had wakened in her body when she was no longer in command of it. She felt burned and scarred and defiled with that unconsenting passion, and her hate for him penetrated her dreams and her flesh.

More than all, she hated him when he asked her to marry him, offering to cover the *amour* with the cloak of his princely name. His princely name! A lie, like all the rest of him—lackey, thief, murderer, impostor—and as base as was his cruel and savage love for her captured body. She had refused this bribe to respectability with scorn so keen that it had severed their relations, leaving her to lurk there in the villa, or to flaunt her reckless despair in the casino or on the promenade, while Kurokin went his criminal way.

And then Andrew Torpichen came.

Yes, she must pay the price. He must not pay, for in her wild, unhappy mood of sacrifice she thought that the price he would have to pay for her would be his own social and moral ruin. All that was good in her, all that was chaste in her, clamored for self-sacrifice.

She was lying on the couch in the green and gold salon of the villa—where love had first whispered to her—where she had wept—where violence had filled the night.

Stretched out long and tense and white, she summoned her soul to aid her in her fight against herself and her love and her desire.

She heard the doorbell ring. He would be there, as every day; and, as every day, Grazia would send him away with a stolid refusal. He would not force his way in, she knew. He would not cozen the doorkeeper. His pride would hold him back, even as love for him held her back.



The door opened. She heard footsteps in the hall, and Grazia's voice on a high note. She started up, a panic of fear and uncontrollable hope knocking at her heart.

The *padre* came in. He crossed the room with his military stride, and stood looking down on her. His face was kindly, his old eyes quizzical. His huge, flat hat encumbered his hands. He looked about for a place to deposit it, and then, with a gesture of impatience, tossed it to the floor.

"May I take this chair?"

He drew it toward the couch.

Half sitting, half crouching among the pillows, Lamia watched him. What had this old man to do with her dead, and with her battle?

"There's an east wind to-day," the priest began casually, "for the first time this year; but the *levante* is a good wind—he is the violent herald of spring."

"Why did you come to see—me?"

He bent toward her with a gentleness that none save women and children had ever seen in him.

"Because you need me," he said quietly.

"You have not sent for me—no; but I have come to help you in your hour of need. You, too, are of this flock," he added in an undertone.

More than the kindliness of his face, it was his voice that moved her, with its strange blending of power and tenderness—the compelling voice that belonged to her childhood. There had been another priest who spoke to her like that, long ago, in a far land among tall trees. In spite of herself, she responded to it.

"Yes, father," she whispered.

She closed her eyes, and a fragment of her past came back, exact and clear. She was a little girl again, in the convent. Trees were about it, and walls. She was lying in a little white bed. There were two rows of little white beds, foot to foot; and in each bed a little girl lay. Somewhere a bell rang. Day was just breaking in that northern world; and a sister passed from bed to bed, touching each sleepy forehead with a finger dipped in holy water, and saying softly:

"*Vive Jésus!*"

One by one the sleepy voices answered:

"*Vive Marie!*"

The convent, and the paths in the walled garden, and the color and the silence of the flowers!

"Father," she said at last, "now I know

why you have come to-day. Mary sent you to help me. You must take me away to safety—to a refuge from life. I have been thinking."

"Tell me what you have been thinking."

"I will tell you everything."

With the prompt and unreasoning power of decision which characterizes the woman—and the saint—she knew that she could say everything to this grave and gentle doctor of souls, just as one speaks to a physician, revealing the defects and shames and sores of the physical body.

And she told him—even the things she had hardly confessed to herself. It was her life story, flowing by under his kindly eyes. She spoke in a low voice, rapt, confessional. She lingered over her childhood. That, at least, was beautiful and without vulgarity. Then the death of those who loved her had made a sudden emptiness about her. She was alone, listening for a voice.

What she heard, as other girls hear it, was the call of the ghoul. It tore the emptiness like trumpets. She would be the woman who did things—not as other women did them, half-heartedly. She would give herself to art—the great art for which men burn up their lives. She went to Paris, for the call she heard was voiced by that ghoul of souls, and she answered the irresistible summons.

She flung herself into the squalor and the gayety of the Latin Quarter. The taste of it was foul in her mouth, and in sudden revolt against it she fled across the Seine to the other Paris. She found herself in a madder world—a world of dukes and dancers, bounders from South American republics, yellow diplomatists from all the orient, rogues and royalties, old names and new money, Parisians, Russians, Americans, Greeks famous for their vices or their virtues, jockeys and journalists—the driftwood of midnight Paris.

And there Kurokin found her—a prince! Prince and exile and martyr, haloed with romance—that was the way she saw the savage adventurer who had raised himself on a pinnacle of theft and murder and treachery; but she did not let herself go. She was strong enough to seek safety in flight. Rome would shield her; she would hide in the shadow of St. Peter and his saints and prelates.

Kurokin followed. With his false name and forged papers, he dared not risk facing

a marriage ceremony, even if he ever thought of it. It was easier to pull the wild girl down. The leprous moonlight and the passion-poisoned wine of Rome were his confederates. She woke to find him watching with cynical eyes the horror of her young soul struggling back into its dishonored dwelling place. He was smoking a cigarette.

"The evil that others do to us is not our evil," the *padre* was saying.

Where his ecclesiastical mind saw her sinfulness was in the fierce recklessness with which she had thrown her life away, defiantly accepting her rôle of victim and harlot.

"What does it matter, father, now that the evil, as you call it, is done? I want to put a barrier between myself and the world—between myself and every one. Do you not understand?"

"Yes, I understand—every one—that is, the man you love."

"Yes, the man who loves me. He wants to marry me. That would be"—she hesitated over the word—"purgatory for him."

"And for you?"

"For me, too, perhaps, if that's of any importance."

"You have thought it all out?"

"Everything."

She was sitting up on the couch now, her head erect, her eyes fixed on his. Her soul seemed to look out on him, hopelessly, like the face of a prisoner in the depths of a cell.

"And you can help me, father."

"I came to help you."

"I want to go back to a convent—where I came from—and hide myself, and suffer and pay. The strictest religious order—"

She was thinking of herself robed in sackcloth, barefooted, pacing cold, dim corridors. The vision brought her a kind of dolorous comfort.

Perhaps the old priest, having studied the souls of women who love and suffer, captured her fleeting thought. He smiled gently, and for a moment he did not speak. Then he said:

"And you think you are called to a life of prayer and service? It is the very highest vocation, some of us think; but true vocations are born with us. They do not come—they are. Have you thought of that?"

"I am thinking."

"No—not of that. What you are think-

ing of, and what you have thought of, is one thing—the man you love. That is the love you would take with you into a convent—to live with it, to dream of it, to weep over it, to exult in it and in your suffering and abnegation."

"Oh," she cried, "I want to hide!"

She covered her eyes with her hands and cowered.

"Vocation?" The *padre's* voice rose. "No—what is urging you is pride—and cowardice—and fear—and vanity!"

"No, no! I'm not thinking of myself!"

"Pride and cowardice," the priest went on emphatically. "Fear that some one may look askance at you and wound your self-love—vanity—but, above all, the cowardly desire to run away from the consequences of your own deeds."

"Tell me the rest," she said. She was roused, and faced him with steady eyes. "Am I so weak as that? Don't you see that I can't give myself to him? If I didn't love him, it wouldn't matter"—she paused—"or not so much. Father, I only want to save him!"

"Are you not making a lot out of a little?"

"A little—that?"

"You must not think I undervalue the virtue of chastity here on earth, where it reaches up symbolically to heaven; but there are other virtues. You cannot save yourself or the man you love by picking out one of the virtues and crucifying yourself for it."

"But I thought—"

"No, you don't think—you love; and the greatest of these is love."

"What shall I do? What shall I do?"

There was a look of fervor in her eyes, yearning for sacrifice, hunger for love.

The old, wise man looked at her gravely. For a long while his eyes were bent on her tormented face. Years of meditation, years of experience in studying the fierce, fluttering souls of women who burn and weep and suffer, had given him a kind of clairvoyance that saw all things. He seemed to be looking into the innermost being of this one woman, seeing there her passions, her memories, her frailties, her illusions, and, high above them, the compelling love that was the rock and refuge of her troubled life.

Nothing else mattered, for this woman was love—created for steadfast love as suns were created for steadfast light. A

spot on the sun? A tarnished shadow on the mirror? Still the mirror garners the unstained light; the sun is ever more the home of life-giving force.

Suddenly the *padre* smiled. It was his old half quizzical smile, infinitely wise, patient, and kindly.

"I believe I can tell you what you are going to do—irrevocably. Am I right?"

"What?" she whispered.

He leaned forward and took her hands in his big grasp.

"You are going to marry the man you love!"

#### XXIV

It was in the old church of San Siro, of which Torpichen had once disapproved, that he and Lamia were married. Spring had come that way, and the day was full of warm sunlight.

Marwick waited in the car outside. Apparently he was absorbed in contemplating the caper bush, with its crooked branches, and its pink and white flowers now just coming into bloom. He was wondering, as so many others had wondered, how it had ever got there, just above the portal of the old church, and what it was.

The peasants would have explained that a miraculous wind had blown the seed hither. The *padre* would perhaps have told him that it was a symbol proclaiming that life is a little thing, and that, even as the flower of the caper withers, so man goes to the house of his eternity—in *domum eternitatis*; but the old priest was not there to enlighten Marwick on the subject of the vine, so he continued to stare at it with uncomprehending eyes.

Within the dim church the *padre* was saying the age-old words that were to link together in mysterious union two souls, wandering in space and time.

In a little while, as Marwick waited, Lamia and Torpichen came out of the church. The streaming sunlight met them as they came. Behind them, in the shadow of the portal, loomed the tall, dark figure of the priest. His face was grave but kindly. He held out both his hands to them.

"I shall say good-by here," he said; "but my prayers shall go with you."

"Good-by, *padre*!"

"Good-by!" Lamia's eyes were clouded with tears, but not tears of unhappiness, as she whispered the word and raised the old priest's hand to her lips. "Good-by!"

The *padre* went back into the church. Torpichen helped his wife into the motor car.

"You know where to go, Marwick. Drive slowly."

"I quite understand, sir."

Marwick understood, but he did not quite approve. Indeed, the wedding was not at all what he thought it should have been. It was the sort of thing foreigners would do.

In the first place, it was the wrong kind of a church. Then there had been no wedding guests—not to speak of a best man, and bridesmaids, and nice little pages in pink silk breeches and laced coats. Moreover, to his mind, the bridal couple, gray-clad for travel, lacked distinction.

They went along the sea-girt road toward Ospedaletti. For a while they were silent. Lamia's eyes were on the olive groves that rose terrace upon terrace, while Torpichen looked seaward, where the sunlight blazed a path to far-off Corsica.

At last he turned and took her hand—naked save for the sacramental ring that he had just slipped on one finger. She turned to him with her wonderful smile—her real smile, without artifice, infinitely gentle and intimate.

"I was saying good-by to the hills," she said; "to the hills and the trees."

"And I was greeting the sea, which is to bear us away to other lands, and other hills and trees—the ones that are really our own."

"Yes," she answered musingly. "I wonder, Andrew—"

"Yes?"

"I wonder what I shall find there. It is so long ago, and my childhood seems so far away!"

"Up in those woods you've told me about—your woods in the north—we shall find the little girl you were."

"Perhaps!"

"Anyway, we shall look for her—though I like this Lamia best."

Marwick had halted the car at the side of the road. Between old walls, a stony path, worn by the tiny hoofs of generations of little donkeys, wound up into the hills.

"Do you remember?" Torpichen asked.

She glanced curiously about, and then a flush came to her face.

"I remember," she said. "Of course we must go."

He helped her to alight, and slowly they went up the steep and broken path. Halfway, where the wall curved in, was a wretched-looking wayside shrine—a mere post with a poor, warped picture of the Madonna in a wire-screened niche. A votive offering of a few wild flowers lay withering in front of the unlighted lamp. Underneath some ribald hand had scrawled in red chalk:

*"Viva Lenine!"*

"They might have waited," Torpichen observed gravely. "In a few years the pale face would have faded away and the poor shrine fallen into dust. There is so little of it left!"

"But what has the Madonna to do with this angry scream of sordid politics?" Lamia exclaimed.

"I suppose that, in a practical way," Torpichen suggested, "the dreary little helot who wrote that was logical enough. Communism is not an economic problem—in its very essence it is a negation of God. If it doesn't mean that, it means nothing. The Bolsheviks are logical when they destroy the ancient symbols. An old peasant woman brought me a crucifix the other day. It was a wonderful bit of ivory—very yellow, and carved in the long ago. I can't describe the mystic sense of those anatomical lines—you must see it yourself. The old woman sold it because nightly, when her son came from the wine shop, he cursed the poor figure and spat upon it. She, you must remember, was not quite sure that God was dead; but her son knew. He had been personally informed of the nonexistence of God. A fellow who had come all the way from Moscow told him so one night, so he really knew. Of course, he still crosses himself when he meets a black cat, and when an owl hoots three times. He crooks his fingers to ward off the evil eye, and studies his dream book before playing a number in the lottery; but he's got rid of the Great Superstition, and I have come in for the wonderful old crucifix. I shall give it to you, dear. It is very beautiful—a carved prayer."

"The poor, poor thing!" Lamia lamented, full of sympathy.

Kneeling before the saddened and outraged Virgin, she threw away the withered leaves rotting in the can, and replaced them with the flowers she carried in her hand. Then, slowly, arm in arm, as on the first day when they had been brought together

—out of space and infinite time to journey on and on together—they turned out of the little mule path into the hills.

They came to the olive tree beneath which they had sat on that initial day. Nothing was changed, except their two lives. The lizards had not changed; one of them darted along the gray wall and paused to worship his god.

"It's our little lizard," she exclaimed. "I'm sure it is the very same one. You said he was a sun worshiper. Look! Is that the way he prays?"

The lizards had not changed. The olive tree whispered its old quivering message, as if mourning over its own deformity. Only they had changed. For them, life had turned on its axis.

Something of that kind crossed Torpichen's mind, as he sat beside her there on the warm hillside.

"Do you remember the man in the Arabian tale?" he asked inconsequently. "Do you remember the one-eyed man in rags and dirt? There were three of them, I think; and when they were questioned, they answered mysteriously, 'We are three calenders, sons of kings;' and I think the mob jeered at them and laughed. What I mean is that I was like them—you, too, dear one—do you mind if I say it? We were half blind beggars, like the three ragged fellows. We didn't know, or we had forgotten, that we were, as they were, children of kings. We didn't know that the rags and the way-faring and the begging for broken meats were only temporary, and that some day we should come home from exile. Dear one, until you taught me, I did not know; but oh, king's daughter, you made me remember that I, too, am the son of a king and should no longer be a wanderer, wasting life away on dirty highways. To live high and clean, for the king's daughter—"

She had listened quietly, though for an instant there was a fleeting look of pain in her eyes. When she spoke, it was merely to echo his words:

"Home from exile—yes, that is it!"

"Both of us, Lamia," he said.

"Yes!"

And again they were silent, hand in hand, while the little sun lizard darted to and fro on the wall, watching them, or raising his tiny head to stare full at the sun—at the splendor of his god.

At last Torpichen rose, and, stooping, lifted her to her feet, as he had done on



that other vanished day, when they had not yet remembered their kingly lineage. For a moment they stood looking seaward.

Then, suddenly, she exclaimed:

"Andrew, look!"

Against the horizon a white yacht showed, over it a faint pennon of smoke flying.

"Aye—that's Forbess and the Demdykes—all of them," he said.

"And they are sailing away into the future, and into happiness, I am sure," she returned.

Torpichen glanced sidewise at his wife. She was still looking out across the sunlit sea, where the white boat was a mere glint of silver.

"I hope so," he replied.

"Andrew, I knew about — Betty," she said, without looking at him. "The *padre* told me."

"Yes? I am glad of that."

"And the *padre* brought me a message from Betty."

"Yes?"

"It doesn't matter what it was," she went on. Turning, she lifted up a radiant face. "It doesn't matter what she wanted me to do—for I've done it!"

He took her in his arms and held her very close.

"Say it," he pleaded.

"Husband!" she whispered, and their lips met.

THE END

#### PAUL VERLAINE

*Before his Statue in the Luxembourg Gardens*

THE sky is just above the trees,  
So blue, so calm,  
As in those lines you wrote yourself,  
Half song and psalm.

The peaceful murmur of the town,  
The plaintive bird,  
Still follow you to this abode  
Where Paris heard.

They gave you paths where children pass  
In joyous bands,  
And lovers fill their silences  
With clasping hands;

And lilacs scented in Japan  
For strange delights,  
And guardians to lock the gates  
Upon your nights.

Does wonder give you this, or pain—  
This furrowed brow?  
What have they done, the ones who pass,  
With their youth now?

Do you regret each subtle song  
The murmurs brought,  
And every vague turmoil of verse  
The poets wrought?

Your gaze is solemn on the earth,  
As if you knew  
The sky is just above the trees,  
So calm, so blue.

Charles Divine